Ore no Imōto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai Volume 5

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These are novel illustrations that were included in Volume 5

伏見つかさ
Tsukasa Fushimi
Illustration◆かんざきひろ

俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない⑤

■ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai⑤

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伏見つかさ

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kuroneko

転生したらスライムだった件

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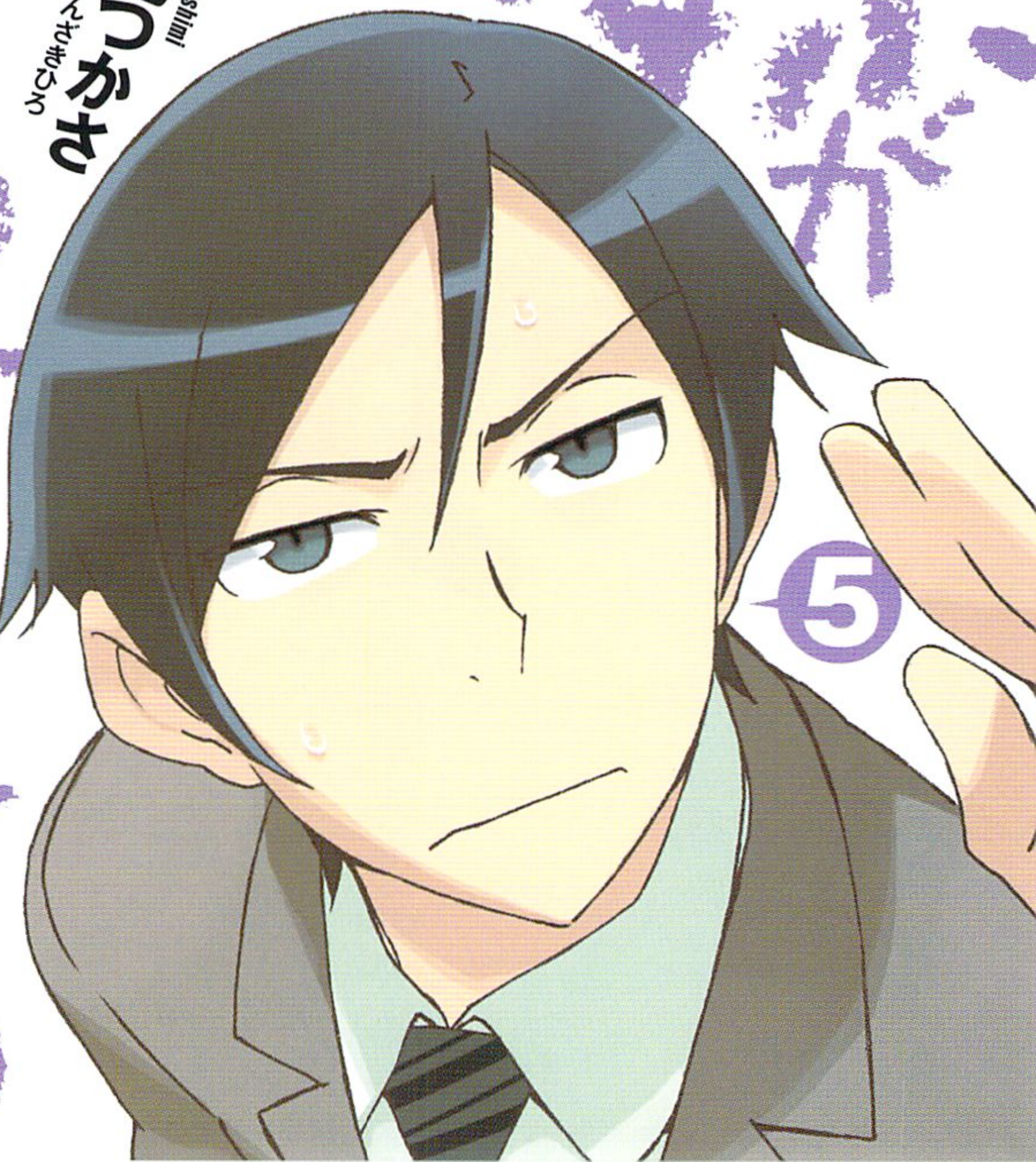
Tsukasa Fushimi
Illustration・かんざきひろ



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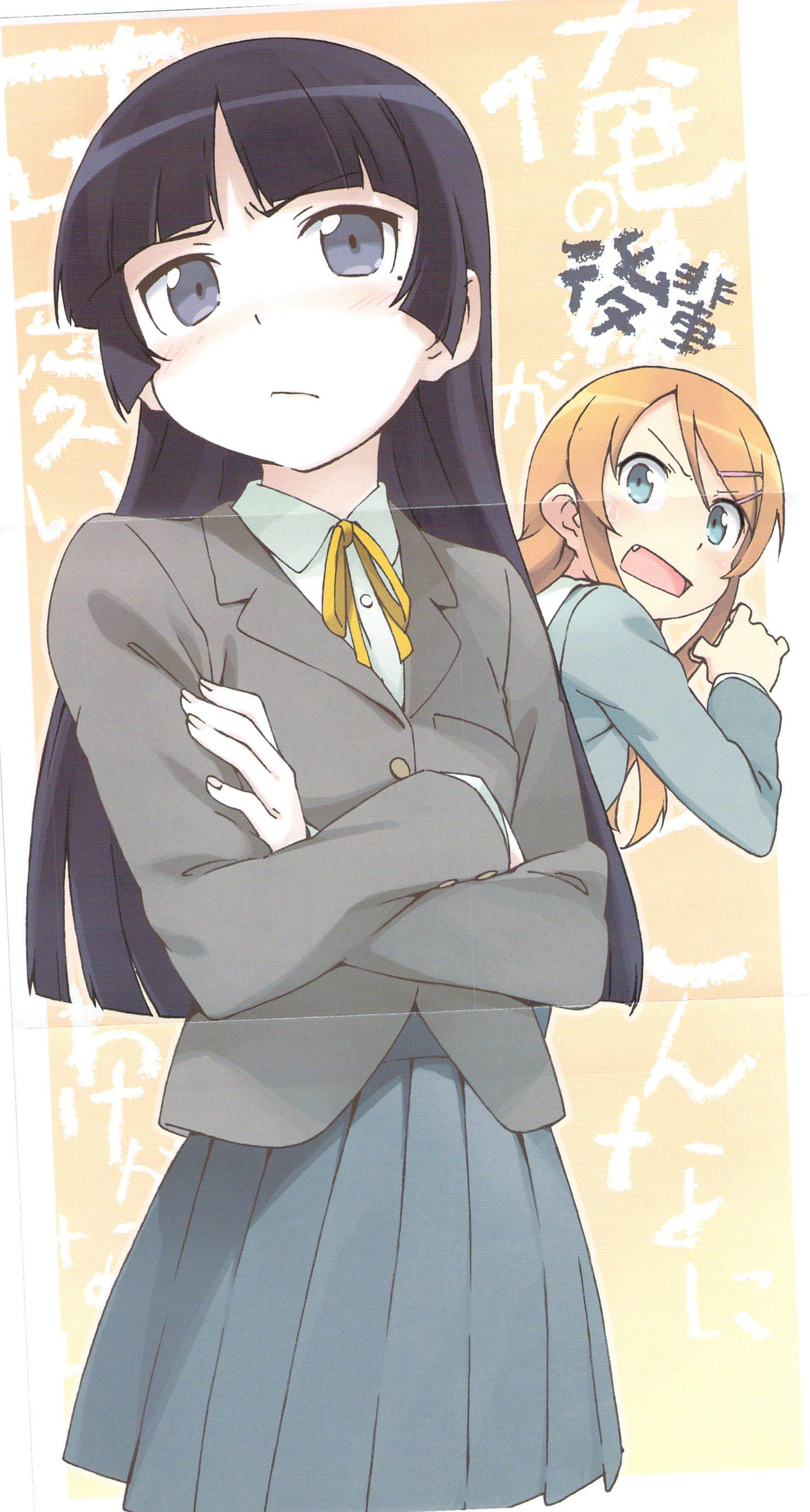

後輩

三年生
三浦

一年生
瀬菜

Mina

Sena

彼女、かわいらしい娘ですよね。
え？　ええ、そうですね、見た目はどちらかというと大人っぽい感じかもしれません。その……胸も……大きい……ですしね？　いやっでも、そうじゃなくて――僕が言っているのは、性格を含めたパーソナリティの話ですよ。すごく真面目で、融通が利かなくて……自分の周りにあるものを、みんなカタにはめたがっていて。そのわりに隙が大きくて、自分の理想を自分自身実践しきれていなくて、そんな自分にいらついて――そんなひたむきさ……っていうんでしょうか？　必死で背伸びをしているところが、かわいらしいと思うんですよ。見ていると、応援してあげたいというか……ついつい放っておけない気分になってしまうんです。でも、きっと彼女に手を貸したら、お節介するなって叱られちゃうんでしょうね。……え？　は、ははは……いや、まあ、その……お察しのとおりです。えっと……いまだから言いますけど、当時彼女に声をかけたのは、そういった僕の個人的な理由もですね、結構な割合で……混じっていました。
……とまあ、実は、そういう事情があったわけでして。当時先輩に意地悪な質問をしてしまったことは、水に流して欲しいな、と。あ、気にしてないですか？　ならいいんですが。
え？　彼女のことを、いまは、どう思っているのか……ですか？
え……えぇ～～～～と、ですね……。
……困ったなあ……あ、あはははは……。

新キャラクター紹介

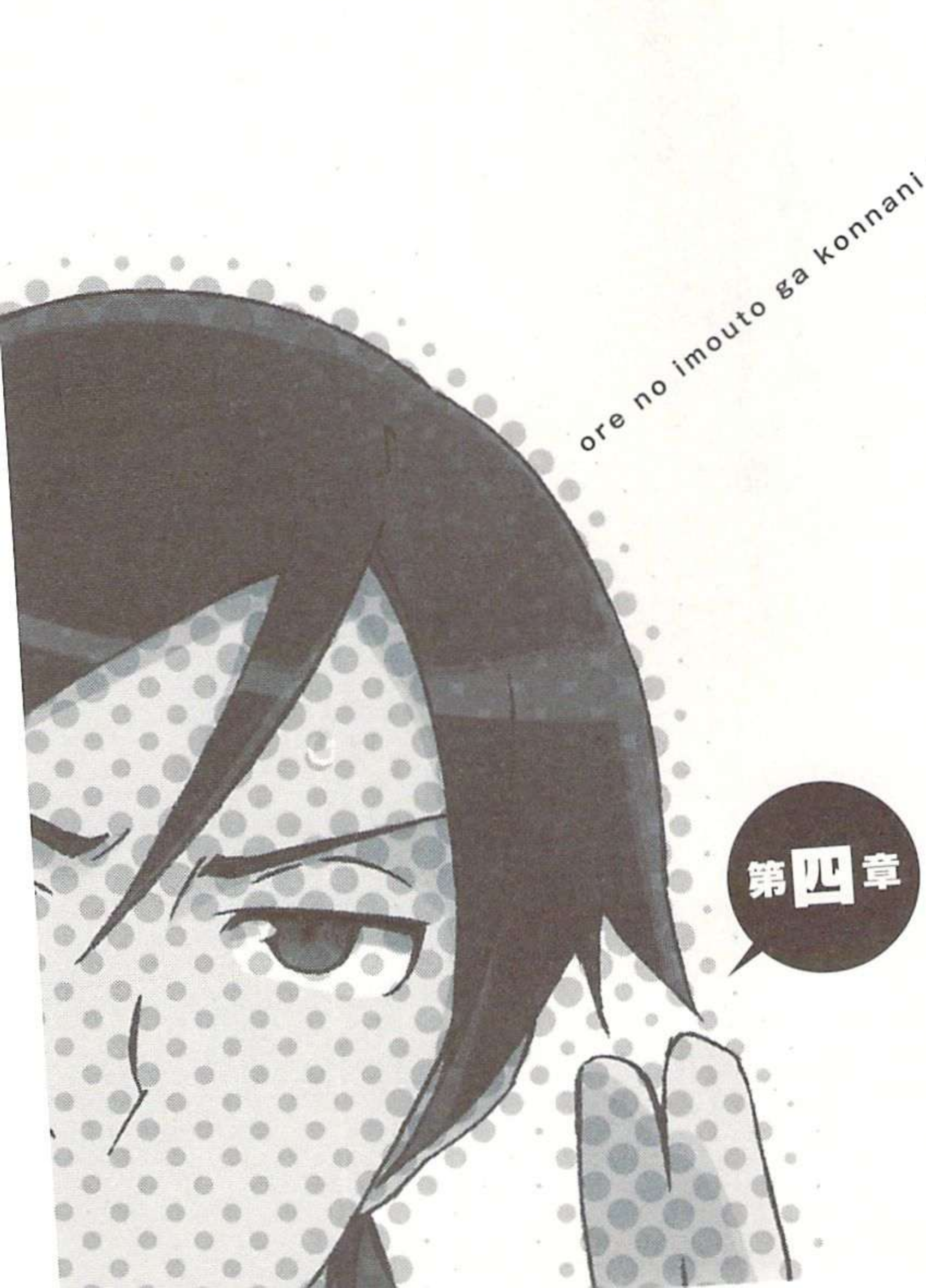
（語り手：真壁 楓）

うーん。あの人を一言でたとえるなら、奇天烈な変人というのが妥当でしょうね。そのうえバカです。アホでもあります。おまけに好きな女の子のタイプは虫口川限定らしいです。まったくあんなんで将来どうするつもりなんだか――ひどいこと言うなって？　あはは、いいんですよ先輩、いつもいつもあの人のトチ狂った所業のせいで迷惑を被っているのは主に僕なんですから。愚痴くらいにぼさせてください。そうそう、この前だってあの人が僕の部屋に魔改造フィギュアをいつの間にやら勝手に飾っていったせいで、全裸の初音●クが掃除中の姉さんと御対面ですよ。いまだに姉さん僕の顔を見るたびに顔を赤らめるんですけども、どうしたもんでしょうかね。
コホン。まあ、とはいえ……僕があの人のことを嫌いかというと、そんなことは全然なくて。ええ、もちろん、じゃなかったら一年以上も連んじゃいませんけれども。なんて言ったらいいんだろうな……ようするにあの人は、バカですけれども善人で、その上異常なまでに前向きなんです。常に『楽しくやろうぜ』と言ってのが、頭にあるっていうか。良くも悪くも、そのためには努力と行動を惜しまない人ではあります。
それこそ『楽しくやるため』にだったら、平気で命くらい懸けてしまうかもしれません。なにせ頭おかしいですから、あの人。
だからこそみんな――あの人の奇行に辟易しながらも、一緒にになってバカになって、『楽しくやって』いるんじゃないですかね？

五等分の花嫁 5

Tsukasa Fushimi
Illustration・ふゆみつかさ
イカヤ●巫鯛命

ore no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga



第四章

Chapter 1

ore no
imouto ga
konnani kawaii
wake ga nai
❺

第一章

It has been a month since my sister left.

However, my life remains unchanged.

Even when she was at home, we only talked to each other during our life counseling.

Aside from that, we rarely spoke or even looked at each other.

So even if my sister is gone, my life still remains unchanged.

Alright, Let me tell you the truth.

I feel kind of happy, without having to worry about being caught in a strange commotion.

I feel more comfortable without her. No-one is going to take over the living room, no-one will bring their friends home and kick me out. I no longer have to endure the noise from the next room.

Well, of course, I feel a bit disappointed about our last life counseling session... Ah, but in the end, I think she is cute... somewhat.

Or not. I'm not really sure myself.

Because she left without telling me anything.

--- Good night, Aniki

Well, whatever. Do as you please.

So this month I've had a nice, comfortable time.

However, there was a little incident.

This happened on the first day of my new school year.

"Good morning, senpai."

One of my juniors said that to me.

She was blushing slightly, her shoulders stiff and her face held a small smile.

I could tell that she had many conflicted feelings.

I asked the girl in our school uniform, rather than her customary gothic dress,

"Aren't you... Kuroneko?"

"Hmph, what is with you?"

Although still a bit hesitant, she replied with a mocking laugh. Hearing that, I finally confirmed that she was Kuroneko.

Kuroneko is an otaku and one of my sister's closest friends.

Then she turned toward me and placed her hand on her chest.

"Did I surprise you?"

"Not really – no, wait, yes!"

I immediately nodded.

"Of course I'm surprised. Are you... going to the same school as me?"

"Yes," Kuroneko nodded happily, but she added,

"Don't be mistaken. I didn't transfer here because of you."

"Yeah yeah, I know already."

There is no need to dig into that matter anymore.

"I knew that your house is nearby, but I never thought you would go to the same school as me. Why didn't you tell me about that sooner?"

“This is my own choice. Besides, how come it’s your business to know what school I go to?”

"That's true, but… well, I'm happy."

Kuroneko's eyes widen, but she quickly returned to her normal self, with her expressionless face.

So this is what you meant at that time...

"I will have a different name to call you in two months. ", huh?

From "Onii-chan" to "senpai"?

I smiled. For some reason, I feel like I can have an honest conversation with her.

"Okay, pleased to meet you, kouhai. Your uniform looks great."

"Pleased to meet you, senpai."

She said in a small voice, then immediately turned and continued to school at a faster pace.

What's wrong with her? Suddenly getting upset like that. I have seen Kuroneko's expressions many times, but I still don't understand why she would suddenly get upset.

"Maybe she doesn't want to be late for the opening ceremony?"

I was going to chase after her, but someone called my name from behind me.

"Kyou-chan! Kyou-chan!"

"Ah…"

Manami…

Tamura Manami. My childhood friend. A plain girl in glasses.

"Sorry, I forgot about you."

"I can't believe you…"

She tried to hit me with her bag.

Allow me to explain. Normally, I go to school with her every day, but today I completely forgot about her and chased after Kuroneko. That's what happened.

Since Manami didn't want to interrupt my conversation with Kuroneko, she silently waited nearby.

"That was a new student, right? Is she your friend?"

"Yes, she is."

"Close friend?"

"Yes."

At least I think so. I believe Kuroneko also thinks about me that way.

"We are sort of online friends. Although she can be hard to understand, she's a good girl."

"So that is it…"

Manami smiled. I calmed down after seeing that.

"If we meet again I will introduce her to you."

"Okay."

Manami nodded, then asked,

"By the way, what is her name?"

"Kuroneko."

"Huh?"

Manami seems puzzled. I can almost see the question mark over her head.

“Miss Kuroneko? Is that her family name, or is it her given name?”

Ah, I forgot. Since I always call her that, I answered automatically. Kuroneko is her nickname. No wonder Manami seems puzzled.

“Uu…Miss Kuroneko or Miss Kuro or maybe it’s Miss Neko?”

As expected.

"All wrong. Sorry, Kuroneko is her nickname. I met her on a fanpage online several months ago."

"Ah, I see."

“Since we met online, I always call her by her nickname. In fact, I don’t even know her real name.”

"I see…"

"So…Kyou-chan doesn't know Kuroneko-chan's name, right?"

"Yeah…"

Sadly, this is the truth.

Both Saori and Kuroneko are good friends of mine.

But I don't know their real names, their addresses, their schools, their families…. I don't know any of that.

The only hint I have is the package that came from Saori before, but I haven't asked her for confirmation yet. Besides, for an online friend to ask for real life

information is a no-no, so I have no intention of asking her anyway.

But now Kuroneko goes to the same school as me so things are different from before.

She is no longer just my "online friend". She is my junior now, our relationship can't remain the same.

At least, that is what I thought.

No no no, I have no dirty thoughts or whatever.

Everyone would feel happy if a friend suddenly went to the same school as them, wouldn't they?

At the time, I thought how interesting it would be.

Glancing in Kuroneko's direction, I whispered

"Kuroneko…what exactly is your name?"

"Gokou Ruri."

Kuroneko turned away and whispered

"This is my name when I am in human form…"

"Go…dou?"

"Gokou. Use the word 'go' from number five."

Gokou Ruri

Gokou Ruri

That's a nice name!

"Disgusting. Why are you smiling?"

"Sorry sorry. Don't mind me. I almost called you Kuroneko again."

"..Just as I thought. Even I'm not sure why I let you know my human form's name. You should continue to call me Kuroneko."

"All right."

I nodded.

"Please tell me again why you two are in my room?"

By the way, I'm in my room after coming back from the opening ceremony.

"Hahaha! What are you talking about Kyousuke! Shouldn't you ask that immediately after you enter your room? Why do you ask after you've spent time talking with us?"

"That's because I was so surprised! I – Hey, Saori, what are you doing? What are you doing on my bed?"

"Checking how comfortable it is, of course."

What I wanted to ask is how can you act like this is completely normal! I can feel a vein in my forehead about to pop.

This girl is Saori Vajeena.

Wearing big, round glasses, with "normal" otaku clothes, she is also my friend.

Allow me to explain everything again. When I got back to my room, they were already here.

Still in uniform, Kuroneko laid down on my bed, reading manga.

Saori was on the ground, playing a game.

Faced with that, I could only stand here, stunned.

And as a result, instead of asking why they were here, my still shaken brain asked Kuroneko's name instead.

That led to the previous conversation.

"Phew…."

Rubbing my forehead, I tried to voice my question in the easiest way to understand.

"First, why are you two in my room and acting like it's yours?"

"Please don't bother us with those trivial matters. By the way, since we are your guests, why haven't you brought food or drinks for us?"

"Sorry! We are not that close!"

Yes, I'm a magnanimous man! And please, don't casually lie on my bed!

Saori said, not an ounce of shame in her voice:

"Kuroneko said that Kyou-kun probably feels lonely, so we came to visit you. Right, Ruri-chan?"

"Don't just make something up for your convenience. Who is Ruri-chan anyway?"

"Ahahaha…Ruri-chan is so cute when she is embarrassed. Didn't you come here today in order to show Kyousuke your uniform?"

"Sorry, but I've already seen her this morning…"

"W..W..What? Ahh… I see…"

Saori turned toward Kuroneko,

"Kyousuke must have praised you in that uniform right? I think he would be saying something like "Wow, I almost don't recognize you. You look good in that.", right ? And then – still acting coldly, Kuroneko felt happy, so

she kept wearing that uniform when we came here. Hm Hm, that must be it, right? Otherwise, there is no way Kuroneko would give up her gothic lolita outfit."

While Saori let out an evil laugh, I tried to remember this morning. Sure, I did praise her and she did reply dispassionately. But I think Saori was overthinking it.

At the same time, Kuroneko started denied it. Standing up from my bed, she said

"That's completely wrong. I only felt that to go back home to change would be too troublesome."

Then she turned away, upset.

I think I get it now. Kuroneko has a little sister too. They are both good people, so they probably worry that I feel lonely after my sister left. That's why they came to my home. And for some reason my mom let them into my room?

Sorry, but you guys worry too much.

After my sister left, I've never felt more relaxed than I do now.

But thank you for your concern.

I slowly nodded, but Kuroneko seemed even more upset,

"What was that girl thinking? I just can't understand her..."

Saying that, she buried her face into her knees.

At that time, Saori finished building a figure, and said:

"Okay, let's stop here for today."

Placing the figure on the ground, she turned to me and smiled.

"Kyousuke, even though Kiririn is gone, we are still friends, right?"

“Yup!”

I couldn't help but laugh.

"Of course we are."

Of course we are friends.

I like you guys.

And so, on the first day of the new school year, two school girls visit my room.

Some may say I'm lucky. But the truth is, considering how big Saori is and Kuroneko's sharp tongue, there is no way something embarrassing could have happened.

Today is the same. The three of us gathered in my room as usual.

I'm sitting on a chair, while Saori is building a model and Kuroneko...

Suddenly, Kuroneko stared at the space between my legs.

"Kuroneko, what are you looking at?"

"That."

She pointed at the space below the chair.

A quick look tells me that there is an eroge game box there.

This is "Sis X Six – A brocon little sister's story" – something that should never appear in the room of a brother who has a real little sister.

"Where have I seen this before?"

"Ahaha. Let me explain... that isn't mine. I didn't buy it . Kirino gave it to me. Do you remember when you guys tried to cheer me up with maid costumes?"

"Aha – that was your present, right?"

Saori laughs.

Kuroneko asked, her face blank,

"You still haven't played it?"

"Nope. I don't have a laptop. And I don't want to use her PC without permission."

That's why I haven't played it. Beside, I'm not interested in that kind of eroge in the first place. So I haven't really thought about playing it.

"I can help you. If you want, I can give you my old laptop."

"Nah, I have no need for a laptop."

“ Ah-Ah, Kyousuke, wait a second. Please accept it for me. Taking care of an old laptop is quite troublesome, so please help me, okay?”

"Really? Hmm... In that case, I'll take it."

"Excellent! Next time we visit, I'll bring it with me."

"Thanks."

I look at the game that Kirino gave me and smile.

Even if she is no longer here, her otaku friends are with me now.

Looks like my otaku habit is not going anywhere for a while.

"By the way…I can't believe she left without saying anything to you guys."

"Hmph. She only left some notes in our SNS diary, about what happened. That's all. Even I have no idea what that's about."

"Me too."

After Kuroneko finished, Saori nodded.

"In other words, Kirino hasn't contacted you guys since she left?"

"Yes."

"That's right."

What is she thinking?

I can tell something is a little bit off here.

She didn't even tell her best friend Ayase before going to the United States.

The truth is, only my Mom and Dad knew about it.

Not only that, she has completely cut off all contact with us.

I have no idea what my little sister was thinking.

I sighed.

"She's hopeless. It's probably too late, but please allow me to apologize in her place. Sorry. You guys helped us so much."

“…It’s fine with me. I already knew for an online friend, something like that would happen sooner or later and I’m fed up with her anyway. I even feel happy now that she is gone.”

Poor Kuroneko is acting awkward now.

She looked like a girl who had just been abandoned by her boyfriend.

On the other hand, Saori shows a completely different attitude:

"Let me be honest. I'm very angry."

Saori stood up, hands on her hips. She suddenly looks like Kirino.

"I see."

I'm shocked. This is my first time seeing Saori get angry. In my mind, this girl is only capable of feeling joy and happiness. She always has that happy smile.

But now Saori spoke in a different tone,

"Of course I admire Kiririn's upward mobility. I also understand that studying abroad is much better. In fact, I'm not surprised about the fact that Kiririn earned a scholarship abroad. I can understand that but - no, perhaps I should say because even if I can understand her reasons, I still can't forgive her."

She coughed and continued,

"I—Kirino is a good friend of mine, and I think Kirino thought so too. That's why when she left without telling me, I felt very sad. To imagine that we won't be able to play together anymore... I don't know what to do..."

"Saori..."

"And then... no email, no phone call, no online diary updates. She hasn't appeared on twitter either. I'm even more angry. How could she just quietly disappear like this? So, how can I forgive her?"

I don't know what to say. She was right. They should be close friends, but Kirino suddenly disappeared. It's normal for her to feel betrayed.

I don't think Saori is a selfish girl.

To the contrary, she gets angry because of her strong bond with Kirino.

She is a normal girl, with various emotions like any other.

"All right."

I clapped my hands.

"Let's just forget about her for now and have fun. Then you guys will write it in your SNS diary. When Kirino see it, she will deeply regret her actions."

"Hm…not bad."

"So, what are we going to play?"

I answered them with a smile.

Ah... First my sister completely forgot her own brother , then she forgot both of her friends too. What was she thinking? But she must have a reason to cut all her connections.

I could only sigh.

- Recently, this is my normal daily life.

My otaku friends are here with me. My room turned into our playground, but my sister is gone.

Although there are many changes compared to a year ago, I am not troubled by them.

The truth is this unusual life has become a part of my daily life.

So, it turned into my "normal" life.

Now, I have a new junior…..

The second day of the new school year. After the bell signaled that class had ended, chaos erupted.

Manami came to me.

"Let's go back together, Kyou-chan."

"Ok."

As luck would have it, I'm in the same class as her this year. But really, I think that even if we were in different classes, she would only take a bit longer to come to me.

I'm in high school, my third year now. My friends have had some small changes, but as long as Manami is with me, I don't care.

"Ah... I wish there was something new …"

"Something new?"

"Nothing."

I took my bag and stood up. But halfway down the hall I said,

"Wait Manami, I want to go somewhere else first"

"Okay. Where do you want to go?"

"The first year's classroom."

"Ah, do you want to see Kuroneko?"

"Yes, I want to properly introduce you two. Let's go."

"Ok."

I have walked there a few times before, so I remembered the way. The first year classroom is right below ours.

However, suddenly Manami brought up an... uncomfortable topic.

"You still haven't been able to contact Kirino?"

"Yeah. I'm fine with that, but her friends are getting worried. I called her yesterday, but no one answered. I sent some emails too, but none of them were replied to."

Of course there wouldn't be any replies. Even Saori and Kuroneko had no luck. What is she thinking?

After hearing my reply, Manami seemed sad.

"So… you must be very lonely…"

"Hmm? What?"

"Really…. What you speak and what you think are so different. You wanted Kirino to answer, didn't you?"

"Of course not. I don't want to speak with her."

I began to pick up the pace.

At that time, we saw a girl walking toward the staircase near the first year classroom.

"Ah, Kyou-chan, isn't it..."

"Right."

We followed her. Leaving Manami behind, I started running, calling out to her.

"Hey, why are you going back already?

Still holding her coat, the girl – Kuroneko turned toward me.

Her face showed no expression, making it impossible to tell what was on her mind.

I almost stepped back, but still managed to ask her.

"Didn't I send you a message telling you to wait for me after class?"

Kuroneko answered in an ice cold voice

"Really? I don't remember."

"Hey hey..."

What the heck? The last time I saw her, she was in a good mood.

Why do you become so cold at school?

At that time, Manami managed to catch up.

"Phew. Phew. Kyou-chan, please wait..."

Still breathing hard, Manami seemed to realize the awkward atmosphere between Kuroneko and I.

"Ah... Um. Did something happen?"

There were several seconds of silence, during which Kuroneko's eyes switched between me and Manami. Then she asked:

"Senpai, who is that?"

"Ah, right. I'm going to introduce you two."

"Hello, Kuroneko-chan. I'm Tamura Manami, please to meet you – can I call you Gokou-chan?"

After that, Manami showed her brightest smile.

At that time, Kuroneko trembled, as if she is meeting the demon king.

"So you have shown yourself...Belphegor…"

...

?

"Bel…phel?"

Of course Manami doesn't understand this word, she turned and looked behind her.

Sorry Manami.

There is no one called Belphegor behind you.

Belphegor is a character which is based on Manami from one of Kuroneko's manga. In that manga, Belphegor is a demon, a final boss.

Very hard to understand, right?

By the way, about that manga...

Kuroneko never met Manami before, how could she know about Manami?

I hadn't thought about it before. Well, it's not something special, so I'll let it slide for now.

"Hey, Kuroneko. Get a hold of yourself. Come back to reality. This isn't your manga!"

"Of course I know that."

Although with that being said, I still can’t help but feel suspicious.

Kirino once criticized that Kuroneko was the type of author that sometimes placed themselves inside their story.

I hope that she didn't mix up the 2D and 3D world.

Kirino has a strong sense of the distinction between 2D and 3D. However, I can't say the same about Kuroneko.

Maybe that's why she sometimes acts like an anime character. Her favorite clothes, her manner of speech... they are all from anime. This isn't something bad, but now I feel worried about her.

Kuroneko glanced between me and Manami.

But Manami had already recovered. She smiled, then spoke again:

"Nice to meet you, I'm Tamura Manami."

Unwillingly, Kuroneko replied

"Nice to meet you."

"Pleased to meet you."

Still smiling, Manami acted like Kuroneko's action never occurred.

The awkward atmosphere disappeared, replaced by a calm, normal feeling.

However, Kuroneko's next action surprised us.

"I have to go now."

Before Kuroneko could take another step, I grabbed her collar from behind and spoke.

"Wait wait – why are you in such a hurry to go home?"

“..Sorry, senpai. I have to do some work today. Goodbye.”

"Didn't you say that you don’t work on Thursdays before?"

"…Today there is a new episode of Maschera, I want to go home quickly and watch it."

“Didn’t the second season just end?”

"Don't speak like Maschera will be cut forever!"

"Wha-!"

What the? Her tone is clearly different from before! What is with you?

This is my first time seeing Kuroneko speak in such a tone.

Looks like I touched an otaku’s sensitive spot.

"Sorry sorry. Maschera just got temporarily stopped. Is that okay with you?"

"Hmph! Remember to never insult my anime again"

But why did you lie to go home? I still haven't spoken with you yet -

It's not like I'm all over her, but I'm worried.

On the other hand, Manami seems to have taken great interest in Kuroneko and said,

"Excuse me, can I call you Kuroneko?"

"Whatever you want."

"Um... then, Kuroneko, how do you feel about this school? Do you still feel nervous?"

"Nothing."

"So... er... is the school close to your home?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

Ice-cold conversation.

No matter how cold Kuroneko replied, Manami kept smiling. And no matter how much affection Manami showed, Kuroneko always replied with a very short and cold line, clearly intended to cut the conversation short.

Hm... where have I seen this kind of conversation before?

I definitely saw it somewhere before…. Ah….Ah…. I remembered.

“Hey…Kuroneko …come here for a second”

“…? What do you want?”

After Kuroneko unwillingly moved closer to me, I brought my mouth next to her ear.

I glanced toward Manami’s puzzled face and whispered

"Hey, do you... hate Manami?"

"No."

That is the same as Kirino's answer.

What is going on? They shouldn't know about each other.

This should be the first time they met each other. Why are their attitudes toward each other in such a negative state?

"Ah, is this because of Kirino? Did Kirino say something about Manami? That's why you picture Manami as a demon king from your manga, right?"

Kuroneko's only reply is a "Hm."

No denial, huh?

Well, at least she is honest.

"Please listen to me. I understand that you and Kirino are good friends, but you shouldn't believe everything she says, okay? This is your first time meeting with Manami, you should see for yourself."

"Didn't I say that I don't hate her?"

Kuroneko said in a small voice but I could see that this wasn’t what she really thought.

Looks like my suspicion was correct. In other words, because Kirino said something, Kuroneko hates Manami now. That's why when she noticed I was about to introduce Manami, she tried to retreat to her home.

But there is something I don't understand.

Whatever Kirino said to Kuroneko, when she saw Manami's friendly attitude she should realized that Kirino's advice was wrong.

So why would she still keep her distance from Manami ?

For me, Manami is my childhood friend, while Kuroneko is a good friend and my junior.

I really wanted them to be good friends with each other.

Of course, this is my selfish wish. I can't force it onto them.

"I understand."

"Hmm?"

Kuroneko took a deep breath then shrugged.

"I said I understand, senpai. You wanted to meet me for something, right? Although I don't want to do it, but this can't be helped. So don't bring your boring, depressed face here. I feel depressed just by looking at you."

Exactly what is this "boring, depressed face" you're talking about?

You really are Kirino's friend. You complain about me whenever you have a chance.

However, just now… shouldn't she have said "I will judge Manami myself."?

No, what she said means that she agreed for my sake because she doesn't want to see me like this?

Kuroneko is truly a good friend.

“Besides, standing here arguing is a waste of time. State your reason to be here. Now!”

"Ah, the truth is I have completed half of my object. I only wanted to introduce Manami to you. Aside from that-"

I wanted to continue "Let's go home together", but suddenly we were interrupted due to someone calling to Kuroneko.

"Gokou-san!"

From the upper floor, a group of first year girls called to us.

They must be Kuroneko's classmates. One of them asked,

"Are you free? We are going to a karaoke bar, do you want to-"

"I'm not free."

Instantly rejected. Hey Kuroneko, your classmates invited you to play with them, and that's how you reply? Even if you don't want to go, don't speak like that.

But Manami immediately started playing peace-maker . She said,

"Sorry, but we need to borrow her for today."

"Senpai?"

"So, um, can you please wait for another time?"

"We understand. Then, bye, Gokou-san."

“….”

Kuroneko waited for her classmates to leave without saying anything.

Manami turned to her, smiling

"Ah, sorry... Did I interrupt something?"

“….”

Still saying nothing, Kuroneko looked at me, then turned to Manami and spoke. I got the impression that she meant "Thank you." and she wanted me to translate that to Manami.

"Ah…that's good then."

Look like I didn't have to do anything. This kind girl always wanted to help others.

“Since we are together, how about you walk home with us?”

"Whatever..."

Kuroneko immediately took a step forward without waiting for us.

This is how Kuroneko and Manami's first meeting occurred.

Well, things could’ve been worse, I guess.

So, we went home together. Of course Kuroneko was still uncomfortable with Manami.

By the way, considering Kuroneko's personality, can she even make one friend in her class?

What happened in school made me a little worried. Right now things are still okay, but if this continues, then her classmates will avoid her.

While I was on my way home, I noticed some tables near the school gate.

"What is that for?"

"Clubs are now recruiting new members. Don't you remember last year?"

"Ah, so it's already that time, huh?"

Every year, after the new school year starts, clubs will begin to recruit new members.

Since classes just finished, there are still many students here.

So they wanted to take the opportunity now huh?

I took a quick look at the nearest table. That belonged to the classical club.

They had two tables, one with many small books, the other bearing a "classical club" sign.

"Ah..."

I remembered my summer Comiket, how otaku sold their doujins in a similar fashion.

"Do you want to join the classical club?"

"Sorry, I'm already a third year." – I coldly replied, and kept moving.

There were still several clubs ahead, but I didn't pay any attention to them.

"Ah, Kuroneko, you haven't joined a club yet, right?"

"…I don't want to. I have too many other things to do."

"You mean you have a part time job?"

"Yes."

"Wow, what is it?"

Right when Manami spoke, Kuroneko immediately turned frosty.

"That is none of your business."

"Ah, okay then."

Manami smiled, but then looked at me with a, “What should I do Kyou-chan?” expression.

Normally, when she made such a face I would say something to encourage her. But Kuroneko was here, so I couldn't say anything. Instead, I shrugged.

Which I hope she would understand as: we can't do anything about it now. We need to take it slowly.

Manami nodded.

So, when we had finished our silent conversation, another student came to us.

"Hey – Tamura! Are you going home with Kousaka?"

"Akagi..."

We both turned toward the voice.

Akagi Kouhei. My classmate.

"Yeah, we're going home now."

"Ok! Bye!"

Akagi smiled with Manami, but somehow I felt uneasy about it.

I wanted to reveal that he once went to buy "homo eroge", but we signed an oath of silence, so I held back.

But then I interrupted him,

"What? You joined a club?"

"Yeah. We've got plenty of new students."

So? How does that relate to me? Get lost!

"So this is good then?"

"Not really. By the way, who is she?"

Akagi turned toward Kuroneko and asked.

At the same time, Kuroneko glanced at Akagi, but she remained silent.

I'm not really surprised anymore. She always seems anti-social. I remembered when we first met at Kirino's offline party, she was isolated until Saori and I joined in.

Maybe the thought that Kuroneko hates Manami is just my imagination?

"She's a new student. I'm going to walk her home now. "

Because Kuroneko still refused to say anything, I could only help her answer.

But Akagi continued,

“Hm? You two know each other? Where did you meet ?”

He glanced at Kuroneko, then turned toward Manami. What was he thinking?

Seems like even Manami didn't understand, she just tilted her head in confusion.

"Is something wrong Akagi?"

"No, nothing Tamura. I just wondered how Kousaka ended up with two beautiful girls."

"Hey, what the hell are you talking about?"

I didn't even want to say anything to him anymore, but Manami seemed to like it. She put her hands on her cheeks and said shyly,

"Ah... Akagi. Did you hear him Kyou-chan? He said I'm beautiful, right? Right?"

"Yeah, yeah, don't mind him."

I turned back to Akagi.

"What are you doing here anyway? Just get back to your club. Or do you want me to reveal the game that you bought before?"

"Okay okay! I'm going to go back soon. But Kousaka, I also have permission from my club president to go meet my little sister."

"Your little sister?"

"Yes, my little sister. Did you see her anywhere? She should be nearby."

"Are you an idiot? I don't even know what she looks like."

Of course I'm a little harsh, but Akagi's reply terrified me.

"That's not a problem. She's the cutest little sister in the world. You will recognize her instantly."

I unconsciously took a step back.

You... what kind of brother are you? Look at yourself!

The truth is, since we met in Akihabara, I already suspected he was this kind of person.

For his little sister, he can go to Akihabara in the middle of the night to buy homo eroge. Not to mention that he was the only male in the line.

That's not what a normal human could do.

Of course I'm not totally normal! I also bought two eroges for Kirino, and then rode a bike back home despite the trip being 32 kilometers.

Wait, does that mean if me and Akagi got into a perversion ranking, I would win?

No, no, no. Must stop thinking about that. Stop. Stop!

"So Akagi has a very cute little sister?"

"Yes. She is wearing glasses, and she looks similar to you Tamura."

So does she look like Manami or is she the cutest sister in the world?

Akagi, are your eyes normal?

Since when was Manami cute? Look again, will you?

Siscons …are so hard to deal with…

I can't believe this guy. He has a real little sister, and he said he likes her? What exactly should I do now?

Thankfully, Kuroneko took a step forward and started walking.

"Sorry, but I haven't seen any girls like that. Later."

"Ah, later."

I turned and dismissed him, quickly trying to catch up with Kuroneko.

Hmm...

If you are talking about appearance, then my little sister is surely cuter than yours.

Manami and I run after Kuroneko.

Suddenly, Kuroneko stopped.

After I caught up with her, I said,

"Sorry for making you wait."

“…..”

No reply.

She ignored me again?

Why did she act like that now?

Hm? No, she was looking at something.

Following Kuroneko's gaze, I noticed that she was looking at the notice board of the Game Research Club.

"Game Research Club huh?"

I didn't even know that such a club existed.

That explained Kuroneko's reaction. She liked games in general, after all.

The game research club had six tables with three laptops, allowing students to try their game.

Every club was doing the same too. Like the football club was having a practice match, and the music club was playing a song.

"Do you want to stop by and try?"

Maybe they noticed us, one male club member spoke.

I had never seen him before, so is he ... a second year student? I noticed that the laptop displayed a shooting game.

"Is this game made by your club?"

"Yes, it is."

So that's why the character looked so horrible.

"This is a joint project game, right?"

"That's right. Our club members try to make games together. Of course, this is the only activity we do."

He smiled wryly, and then continued,

"That's why by showing our games, we hope that everyone will have a better understanding about our club."

Suddenly, Kuroneko said something.

"By the way, this game is used to attract students, but isn't it a bit too hard?"

You really are a gamer, aren't you? You already knew how hard it is?

"I'm not sure. The truth is, our club president did the final check, but we don't have anyone good enough to play on the highest difficulty, so we left it like that."

He smiled again, then said,

"So don't worry. There are normal and easy modes for beginners too."

"Ah, I don't..."

Although he handed the controller to Kuroneko, she didn't take it.

She looked at our school and then the school gate – seems hesitate about something.

Didn't you just say you wanted to go home quickly?

Even as I thought that, Manami gently told Kuroneko:

"This is a good chance. Give it a try, Kuroneko."

"But..."

Kuroneko looked at the laptop again. She looks like she really wants to play.

Maybe she was too panicked, she didn't react to Manami like usual.

But at least I knew that she really had to go home quick. Maybe she had a reason, and that's why she's so hesitant.

"Go on, give it a try. With your skill, this game should be easy, shouldn't it?"

After I encouraged her, Kuroneko made her decision.

"If you insist..."

Kuroneko nodded and took the controller.

The game was named "Righteous Cry."

"What is with that name?"

"I'm very sorry."

Even the club member was saying sorry. Look like the club president named it on his own.

"Okay…I'm starting now…"

Choose the difficulty.

Instead of choosing easy or normal, Kuroneko chose very hard mode.

"Er…Isn't that the hardest mode?"

"No problem."

She started playing.

Looks like it would be a while before Kuroneko could finish, I decided to chat with Manami.

"Kyou-chan, Kuroneko is very good with games, right?"

"Very, very good. Just you wait, she will definitely clear this game."

"But I'm a little worried. Even the producer is unable to finish this game..."

Hey hey!

What the heck? You made a demonstration game that even your president was unable to finish?

"Umm, is this called a... Kuso game?"

"Ha ha ha, senpai, wait just a second. Kuso game doesn't mean a game with impossible difficulty. In our game, if you take it slowly and carefully step by step, then – ah, too fast! She's already finished stage one?"

On the screen, the big boss disappeared in a sea of flame.

"All I have to do is stay close to the boss and use the single short shot. Too easy."

Kuroneko calmly replied.

"By the way, I agree that Kuso Game doesn't mean games with impossible difficulty. This game, while very hard, makes people want to retry over and over again. Kuso games normally mean games with fake difficulty, causing unnecessary headaches."

She kept talking, but her poise remained unchallenged . This is Kuroneko, a god-like gamer.

"But... this is unbelievable! In very hard mode, not only does the player not have unlimited ammo, but the enemy's attacks also triple in speed. Combine that with the controls sometimes randomly changing. Even my club president admits that this is too much! But you can beat it..."

Even the club member is shocked by Kuroneko's skill.

After a few minutes, the perfect logical result that I had expected arrived…

Every club member could only stare at Kuroneko in disbelief.

“Ah… The new students this year are amazing…”

"You mean someone else already beat this game?"

"Yes. There was a girl that did just now."

"Did she join?"

"Of course, we tried our best to convince her to join."

I can't believe it. There is someone as good as Kuroneko among those first years?

"How about it Kuroneko? Want to join this club?"

"Not interested."

Refused again. What is with her today? Why was she always in a bad mood?

At that time, Kuroneko dropped the controller.

"I have cleared everything."

"Impossible!"

All of the club members stood up shouting.

That mean this game's difficulty is not meant for normal humans.

"For real? You cleared everything?"

"And she got the high score too..."

"So? Is that good?"

"Good? This is amazing! Excellent!"

Even as he was trembling with excitement, he offered Kuroneko his hand.

But Kuroneko didn't even look at him.

"Hm. This is clearly a Kuso Game from the beginning to the end. Tell the producer that he should go kill himself."

After saying such rude words, Kuroneko turned to me,

"Let's go home."

"All right. Let's go, Manami."

"Uhm..."

"See you later. Bye."

Saying goodbye to the still frozen club member, we left the school.

"Wait! I will try again later..."

I faintly heard someone say that behind us.

Looks like he wouldn't give up on Kuroneko.

But Kuroneko just kept walking. She didn't show any hints that she heard them.

I chased after her, unsure of my own feelings.

And then, my life without Kirino began.

A normal, boring lifestyle slowly returned to me.

Character file.09
Kouhei Akagi

赤城浩平
【あかぎ・こうへい】

◆京介のクラスメイト。
サッカー部に所属。
腐女子の妹がいるらしい。

◆性別:男
◆年齢:18歳
◆身長:177cm
◆体重:73Kg
◆3サイズ:————

09

Chapter 2

第二章

ore no
imouto ga
konnani kawaii
wake ga nai❺

Time passed. It was now May. To tell you the truth, my situation was still the same: nothing good, nothing bad.

Sometimes I studied to prepare for exams, sometimes I went to Tamura's house to have fun.

Sometimes I chatted with Saori and Kuroneko, sometimes I went to a library in order to study with Manami. A few days ago I received a laptop from Saori.

Of course, there was no noise next to me, no one forced me to play eroge, no one threw a tantrum and asked me to bring them to summer Comiket.

This is a totally normal life style.

It didn't last long.

Kirino still hadn't contacted us, so Saori and Kuroneko were very worried.

By the way, I've got my own problems too...

You ask what that would be?

"Phew..."

In my classroom, I tried to drag my tired body up and listen to my teacher's lecture.

My world history teacher had filled the entire blackboard with words, so everyone tried to copy it down. But my hand couldn't move anymore...

So I took a break and gave my eyes some rest.

I was not the only one. Some of my classmates had also stopped and looked down at the school ground.

Our school's first year girls were having a PE class. I think every male student could admit that if you didn't pay attention, you could easily miss your entire lesson.

Of course, I didn't intend to look at *all* of the female students.

My focus was on Kuroneko. To avoid any misunderstandings, I must state that I didn't mean anything sexually related.

The first year students were partnered up. Among them, there was only one girl who was with the teacher.

"..."

Of course, it was Kuroneko.

Unlike other groups, where two students normally chatted with each other during practice, Kuroneko hardly changed her expression. So, it was understandable that no one wanted to pair up with her.

"Ahh... What is she doing...?"

Suddenly, I felt anxious.

Even her smooth, white thighs couldn't make me feel any better.

And this was not the only time I felt worried.

During break time, I have never seen any of her classmates speak with her. Unlike other girls, Kuroneko always stayed alone.

In fact, this had been happening for more than a month.

I was afraid of that. She simply didn't like to deal with other people, and rejected everyone almost instantly.

I had hoped that after a while, she would drop her mask and get along with her classmates.

So everyone avoided her now? She reaps what she sows.

I understood that she didn't like to communicate with others, but couldn't you at least try?

"How is your class? Did you get a friend?"

"Hmph. This isn't your problem."

Every day, I asked her the same question. Every day, her reply remained the same.

As the first Kuroneko-language researcher, I translated this sentence as "Friends? How am I supposed to make one? Don't speak about such unpleasant things". Poor girl... ~~~~

Kuroneko shifted, averting her eyes.

By the way, this was my room. Both Kuroneko and Saori are here. After that one time, these two often hang out at my house. Saori's still in her normal outfit, while Kuroneko was wearing her uniform.

In my mind, the clothing that Kuroneko's image conjured was slowly changing from a gothic lolita outfit to a uniform.

Just like how she started calling me “senpai” instead of “Onii-san”.

“How is this not a problem? You refused your classmates' invitation and went to my house, right? That’s why you can’t make any friends!”

“Hmph. It really is unfortunate, but I don’t have any time for them. Do they hate me because of that? I don’t care. In fact, I hate them in the first place.”

“You... you...”

You talk big, but in the end, you still refuse to admit that you were wrong?

It was obvious that because you couldn't get along with your classmates, you felt lonely.

But Saori just laughed it off with her usual “Oh ha ha ha ha”.

“What's with that creepy laugh?”

“Ha ha ha... Nothing, nothing. Kyousuke-kun is so slow. What Kuroneko wanted to say is 'Instead of fooling around with my classmates, I’d rather spend time with you.'”

“...”

Wow, she can mimic Kuroneko’s voice too?

Hearing that, I could feel my heartbeat increase by at least double.

Thud! A pillow from above hit my head.

“Don’t... don’t think nonsense...”

“I didn’t.”

Why me? Shouldn't you hit Saori instead?

"But you thought it was the truth, didn't you? It was written all over your face."

"Sorry, my face was like that from the beginning."

...Please stop making fun of me...

"Back to the topic, now, your situation is not good, right?"

"So? What's the problem with that? This is all according to my plan. I don't need a friend."

"Don't lie."

"Kyousuke-shi... I think you shouldn't dwell on that topic..."

But she was clearly lying. If she didn't need friends, then what was I to her?

Kuroneko narrowed her eyes and said:

"I'm not lying. I have no human habits like making conversation or hanging out together."

Really? So, I wasted my time worrying for you? Could you at least encourage me with words?

Maybe she noticed my expression, because Kuroneko said, unsettled:

“Hey... what’s with you? You want to tell me 'Because you have no friends, I’m very worried', right? You should mind your own business.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever...”

She completely saw through me.

To tell the truth, I knew that this wasn't my business. She already said “I’m fine” and my reaction of “No, you aren't fine” was too forceful.

But hearing our conversation, Saori smiled again.

“Ah ha ha ha. Kuroneko is so slow. What Kyousuke-shi wanted to say was 'I wanted to prove myself to my cute kouhai. After I've helped her, I would then have a valid reason to have her repay me later.'”

“Don’t make such a ridiculous translation. Do I look like an evil student to you?”

"How could that be... Kyousuke-shi...do you really, really have no ulterior motives?"

"Hey, hey. Are you really that surprised when a student worries for his junior without any ulterior motives? That hurts, you know?"

But I guess this is Saori's joke...isn't it?

Next is Kuroneko, with a fearful expression she slowly backed off.

"You...you...you... What did you want me to do...?"

"I have no ulterior motives! And why are you hiding under my blanket? I didn't peek at your underwear!"

"Kyousuke-shi, why do you know that you can see her underwear from your position?"

"That's the worst thing you could say at the moment!"

Ah...damn. I only pointed out that I could see her underwear, I didn't mean that I had seen it!

"All right, all right, all right! I admit that I had an ulterior motive! I'm glad that you called me senpai, so I

wanted to help – and then try to improve our relationship – Yes, that's my ulterior motive. But I really was worried about you, that's the truth!"

After saying that, I let out a 'hmm' and turned away. A quick peek showed me that Saori was showing an understanding smile, while Kuroneko dropped her head into her knees.

"Oh ha ha ha, I really enjoy Kyousuke-shi's ignore mode!"

"...But you said those embarrassing things right in front of me... 'I do have an ulterior motive.' Does this count as sexual harassment...?"

Kuroneko whispered, blushing.

Recently, I found out that she's not just shy: she was very shy.

Just as a game character was about to get stripped naked, her whole body froze in place. That's just how shy she is.

It's strange; she could draw porn doujins, yet she was this shy. Of course, I knew that people who spent too

much time on porn will end up poorly in real life, but Kuroneko...

I couldn't understand her.

"Whatever you say, we still have to discuss it today, now!"

I didn't really get it, but I had an idea.

In Kuroneko's point of view, to attend a "What should I do when my classmate shunned me" meeting would be very uncomfortable.

I was sure that she was going to say "I don't need your concern."

In fact, she was already showing signs of agitation. I said I had some ulterior motives, but I helped her. Now her affection points toward me should go up, right?

Of course, my ulterior motives were unrelated. I was doing this of my own will.

Saori chose that moment to interrupt:

"I've got an idea. Please hear it out."

"Oh? Say it."

"How about joining a club? After I formed my anime club, I got a lot of friends with the same hobby, so we can easily strike up a conversation. How about it?"

"Hmm…"

Ten months ago, in order to help Kirino get some friends, I told her to join "Get Together, Otaku Girls".

Saori's idea just came up with was basically the same. She wanted Kuroneko to join a group where they can accept her otaku side.

"This may be a good idea..."

Unlike Kirino, Kuroneko would never hide the fact that she's an otaku.

"What do you think, Kuroneko?"

"I see. You're thinking about that game research club, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

She could see through me. I still didn't know why Kuroneko refused their invitation when they wanted her so badly. Did they want her because of her skill? Or because that their club members were all male, so they needed a cute girl?

Wait a second. Kirino once said how horrible male otakus could be...

"How about I join that club too?"

"...How did you come to that decision?"

I realized that Kuroneko was looking at me with an "I can't stand you anymore" glare.

"Well...if all the members are male, aren't you afraid?"

"In the end, you're like an overprotective father."

Saori smiled.

So noisy. Be quiet for a while, please.

"Why do you think that I would be at ease because of you? Who do you think you are? Do you think I like you or what? Honestly. Gross."

"Well, I can't argue against you. But aren't you the one that asked me to come with you to the publisher?"

"...So what?"

"At that time, I felt at ease. So...I just thought...if we were together, I could learn something new. Sorry, maybe I'm just over thinking."

I tried to explain and apologize.

"Hmph!"

Kuroneko shook her head to the side, and ignored me.

"Say, that means you're a candidate, right?"

"Probably."

"Ha ha ha, Kuroneko-shi, how about you give it a shot ? If you don't like it, you can always quit after that."

Even Saori agreed with me.

"..."

Kuroneko stayed silent for a while, then looked at me.

"...Fine. I don't want to waste any more time on this topic, so I will do as you say. But, do you really have to go with me? Are you...worried about me?"

"Of course."

I immediately nodded.

About one hour after they left, Saori called me.

"Hmm? You rarely call me. What's up?"

"Ah, the truth is, there's is something about Kuroneko that I want to talk with you about..."

"What is that?"

"About Kuroneko's reason to refuse club's invitation. Of course, this is just my guess, but could this be that her reason is the same as to why she refused to make new friends?"

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe Kuroneko-shi did that because she doesn't want to cut down on our time together. I don't know if you are aware or not, but she has plenty of things to do

after school. If she does something else, then our time together will be very short, that's why –"

"She refused the club and avoided her classmates?"

"Of course, that's how she usually is. But as Kyousuke-shi said 'How could this not be a problem?' That's why I think that...maybe because she treasured our relationship, she was isolated from her class."

"So that's why..."

I sighed.

"After Kirino disappeared, this girl...came to my house more often."

"I can understand her feelings. Because I'm the same. We, Kiririn-shi, Kuroneko-shi, Kyousuke-shi, and I, we're a group together. We spent time together, hung out together, had fun together. But now we're one less, so I'm afraid...I'm afraid that someday our group will fall apart.."

Saori explained her feelings and then asked if Kuroneko felt the same too.

So that's what you guys were worried about... That's why even though Kirino isn't here anymore, you still come to my house.

Just one thing bothers me... I always asked myself " How could she be so sure about Kuroneko's feeling?" Because in her case –

"Wait, don't you have a lot of friends?"

"..Not really. You're wrong, Kyousuke-shi. Of course my group members consider me a friend, and they are my friends too. When we go to an offline meeting, we get along quite well. But in fact, when I feel tired or need someone to talk to, for me, I can only go to Kiririn-shi, Kuroneko-shi, or Kyousuke-shi."

Normally, Saori would never say something like this.

"Of course, I know that friends will not stay the same forever. Maybe because of graduation, studying abroad, a quarrel, accidents, transfers, illnesses, misunderstandings... Someday, friends will disappear. And I fear that day might be tomorrow."

I got a glimpse of Saori's hidden inner world. I could also understand her feelings a little. So that was why she always plays a peacemaker.

Because she didn't know how long you can stay together, she treasured them as much as she could, hoping that the time would last as long as possible.

That's what she was thinking.

She always created a cheerful atmosphere. At the same time, she was a vulnerable and sentimental girl, as both were her personality.

It made me realize it again.

"Kyousuke-shi. Please help Kuroneko-shi as much as you can. If there is anything I can do to help, please tell me. I will gladly lend you my support."

"All right, leave it to me."

I firmly answered her.

It had been a while since the last time I felt so motivated.

The Game Research Club room is on the second floor, near Music Club, Classical Club...

“Is it here?”

We stopped near the end of the corridor on the second floor and looked up at the number on the door.

The doorplate read, the Game Research Club.

“So...let’s go in?”

After she confirmed again, Kuroneko nodded.

Right after we entered the club room, we were greeted with a strange scene. How could I describe it...?

All right, first, almost the entire floor was filled with black wire cable.

Next was a long table made from several smaller tables put together.

On that table were a variety of game controllers, screens, PCs and laptops.

Of course, all the PC cases were placed under the table in order to save space. Now, the weather was a bit cold, but the heat from all those machines made it difficult for me to tell if this room was cold or hot.

There were five members inside the room. All of them were male. They were either holding their controller or mouse/keyboard, focused on their screen. The one nearest to the door turned to us.

"Thank you for coming. I have been waiting."

"Um..."

Because Kuroneko kept silent again, I was forced to answer in her place.

I remembered this guy. He was the one we met on the school ground.

"Allow me to introduce myself again. I'm Makabe, second year."

"Kousaka, third year. This is Gokou, first year."

"I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Please."

Makabe seemed polite. His face was a bit child-like, but he tried to be serious.

In fact, he didn't look like an otaku at all. Maybe Kuroneko wouldn't be afraid of him.

"First, allow me to thank you, Kousaka-senpai. Thank you for bringing Kuroneko-san here."

"No need to thank me. She decided to come on her own. Besides, she didn't join yet."

"Still, thank you very much. Here, allow me to introduce you to our club president."

"Hm? You aren't the club president?"

He was a second-year, and also capable of doing many of the club's activity, so I thought he was the club president. But it seems I was wrong.

"Ahaha, I'm only the lowest ranking member. Please, come here."

Makabe led us deeper into the room. Here, there were various eroge game boxes with figures everywhere. That' s enough for me to realize that this club president is a hardcore otaku.

And at the top of those mountain-like eroge boxes...

"Isn't it 'Onii-chan's pantsu'...?"

And here is the female main character's figure...

"Er? What did you just say, senpai?"

"Nothing."

Why was it that I played the same game as a hardcore otaku?

Bad, bad, bad. I've already passed the point of no return.

"President. Kousaka-senpai and Gokou-san is here."

Makabe said to the darkest part of the room.

Because of that, I only now realized that someone was there. And that he just stood up.

"Ah, thank you for your trouble."

After that, he turned to us.

...Have I seen him somewhere before?

I double checked this guy. Black hair, glasses, tall and slim...

What the... Where was it again...? I can't seem to remember...

He began:

"I'm Miura, third year. Game Research Club president _"

Just when he saw my face, he froze.

His eyes narrowed, then it busted open.

Amezon

"Ah! You! No wonder I feel like I've seen you somewhere!"

"Oh?"

"You were the guy who borrowed my Fana bicycle that night!"

"Ah!"

Yes! That night!

No wonder he looked familiar! But wait, he was a student in my school? He was way too old for that! Can someone remain in high school for that long?

While I and the club president pointed our fingers at each other, Kuroneko looked at us with suspicious eyes.

"...Your friend?"

"Err? Kind of..."

What should I tell her? While I was still trying to find the right words, the club president already spoke:

"Hey you! Stop playing dumb! Hurry up and return my bicycle!"

"Wow – sorry!"

I immediately clapped my hands together, and apologized to him.

"I have returned to Akihabara many times, but I never saw you again…"

"Ah, I see."

His anger quickly disappeared. He scratched the back of his head, and said:

"If that's the case, then I'll forgive you. I'm not really sure, but at that time you really needed to get back to your little sister, right? Beside, I'm also at fault for not telling you my name or address, so of course you wouldn't be able to return my bicycle!"

"...I'm very sorry."

I bowed.

I felt like a weight had been taken off my chest.

That time, I told him that I would definitely return his bicycle, but in the end...I was ashamed of myself.

The club president spoke in a small voice:

"I already told you, that doesn't matter. Anyway...how is my Fana doing? Is she well?"

"Don't worry. I placed it in my garage."

I even brought it to a bicycle shop in order to maintain it.

"Good. I'll be coming by to get her back today."

"Got it."

Now, all the club members were gathering around me and their president. Makabe asked:

"Eutou...President…What happened between you and Kousaka-senpai?"

The president laughed.

"We both love the same girl. You could say that we are like brethren!"

"Can you explain it in a way that will not cause misunderstandings?"

Look, Kuroneko was already giving me a cold glare!

Even Makabe was giving his own death glare, forcing the president to stop smiling.

"Don't worry Kousaka-senpai. This is just how our president acts. We club member already knew. I just want to know if you were talking about an eroge? In other words, president and Kousaka-senpai are both in love with a 2D girl, right?"

"No no no no! This is totally wrong!"

Thanks to his explanation, my situation only got worse .

"Hmm? Didn't you have a habit of collecting some kind of pillow, just like our president? Because our president said Kousaka-senpai is his friend, I thought you must also love 2D girls like him."

"I'm a normal guy like you! I'm interested in 3D girls!"

How could he come to that conclusion? And what the hell was I doing, screaming in school like that?

Kuroneko shot me a glare that could melt iron.

"...Can we stop talking about this gross topic? Explain your relationship for me as short as possible."

"I met him at night, when I was buying an eroge in Akihabara."

I could only tell the truth. Well, considering it's Kuroneko, she probably guessed "You must've been asked to do that by your sister". No, she definitely thought that.

After I explained, the president added his confirmation .

"Ah – now I finally meet you, I must ask something. How did that go? Did you succeed in bringing that eroge to your sick little sister?"

"So that's how you remember my story..."

"...Eroge? Sick little sister? What're you guys talking about?"

Makabe's questions made me unable to think of any suitable answers.

Okay, first, those guys think that I have "a little sister with an incurable sickness".

That's partly my fault too. At that time, I didn't explain it clearly to the president.

"Ah...I can't really say it...but I did succeed in bringing that back to her. Allow me to thank you again! Thank you so much! Miura!"

Before I could bow, the president stopped me, said " Don't mention it", and started laughing again.

"In short...Kousaka, right? This guy is a good friend of mine."

"You didn't even know his name 10 minutes ago, yet he's a good friend of yours? Whatever..."

Makabe gave up, not wanting to question his president anymore.

“Ah, Kousaka-senpai. I need to explain something. Our president had repeated a year several times, he really is older than everyone here.”

So that’s the reason huh?

Funny, serving as a commentary, you're really suitable as a moderator, Makabe.

“Hey Makabe, don’t tell everyone my secret.”

“No need to be shy. You really need to graduate soon. You've been here since my first year, that's more than enough.”

“Why do I get the feeling that I can’t argue back. Hey, why don’t you learn from Kousaka?”

The president started laughing again. Even though we just met, he's acting like we were already close friends.

“Not only did I get a new member today, I also met a good friend. Today is such a good day.”

"Pleased to meet you."

I was so lucky.

The club president, Miura, was my savior – although he also seemed odd – somehow.

But at least I knew that he's a decent guy.

I guess I could leave my cute junior to him.

But Kuroneko still looked at us with her death cold glare.

"Is something wrong?"

"...Nothing...I just realized that while I wasn't looking, senpai has become an otaku."

I wasn't able to say anything back.

Compared to one year before, even I couldn't believe that I had changed that much.

"So –"

Miura stood right up, fixed his glasses, and said:

"Welcome to the Game Research Club."

He started by explaining to us what they did in this club.

"For example...wait, hey Makabe, what have you told them ?"

"I have only told them about club members and a background for club's activities."

"I see. So, do you have any experience with our club's activities?"

Both I and Kuroneko replied, "No."

"Have you ever tried?"

"I have tried once, and she seems to have tried many times."

"Allow me to explain. In short, our club's main activity is to create games."

Pausing for a second, the president continued:

"About creating games, not every member takes a part in it. The truth is, we have a lot of ghost members. Every day, besides me and Makabe, those guys over there are the only ones who come."

"Hello –"

In a corner, two guys in front of computers raised their hands.

The president turned back to us.

"When we get a chance, I will introduce everyone in our club to you two."

"Thank you."

If this club had a lot of ghost members, doesn't that mean that this club is quite casual?

Makabe seemed to guess my thoughts, so he added:

"Our club encourages freedom for our members. We hope that by playing games, everyone would try to make their own games and obtain new knowledge on the way."

"In other words, playing eroges is totally normal. Right, Makabe?"

"President, please stop joking around. You just ruined everything I said. By the way, please stop playing eroge in club room. Why can't you just play it at home instead? "

"Don't say that Makabe. You understand that people want to spend as much time as possible with your lover right? I don't want to show off, but I play eroge even after school too."

Crazy! This guy was totally crazy! Thank God that I wasn't his classmate!

"President, no matter what you say, I still feel disgusted. We've got a female junior here, so can you please not talk about it anymore?"

"Ahhh – so noisy, what are you, my mother?"

I could already tell what kind of people that Makabe and Miura were.

"No matter what you say, you can't change the truth. I think it's better if the new members know about the club beforehand and still decide to join."

"Maybe...but can we try some other method? By the way, Kousaka-senpai, even though our president said that, he is actually pretty good at making games!"

"No problem, I actually enjoy the atmosphere here."

"Thank you."

"By the way, I'm already a third year, so I have to study. Is it okay if I act like a ghost member, and only show up once in a while?"

"That's fine. In fact, even ghost members can use club's fund."

So I could join with Kuroneko.

I turned toward Kuroneko, who kept silent from the beginning.

"So..."

"..."

Kuroneko looked like she was thinking about something. After a while, she nervously asked:

"From the looks of it...does no one here like to make games?"

"Of course not! At least I'm still making games."

Miura proudly answered. It didn't look like he was lying though.

Still using her emotionless voice, Kuroneko asked:

"What kind of games you make? FPS?"

"No, no."

"Equipment?"

"We have almost everything necessary to make a game here. Hardware, software, program and books for beginners. Any member can freely borrow these books."

Hearing "freely borrow", Kuroneko's expression slightly changed.

"...You can't possibly buy them all with just club funds ."

"Of course we can't. I bought them with my own money. We are still students, so most of us can't afford a few thousand yen book, or a game maker's program."

Miura was also a high school student, but he spoke as if he was an adult.

Just exactly how old was he?

"I remembered when I first tried to make my own game. I wanted to do that, but the cost was too much. So I created this club, to provide every member the chance to make their own games, as well as make friends."

He laughed, and continued:

"So, here we are. The Game Research Club."

"I see..."

Kuroneko went silent again. Then she slowly looked around at the equipment and books nearby.

I could guess what she wanted to say, so I spoke in her place.

"This girl is interested in making games."

"Wow~ what can you do? Grammar checking? Drawing illustrations? Coding? Don't tell me that you don't know anything, and only care about making the story?"

Miura bombarded me with a ton of questions that I was unable to understand a single word of...

But Kuroneko only replied:

"I can do everything you just said..."

"Everything...?"

"...I'm not sure what your definition of "pro" is, but at least I won't need your beginner books."

Kuroneko's voice remained the same, but Miura let out an exciting "Hooo..."

"Hey hey, Makabe. This junior is really a priceless treasure."

"Didn't I tell you? She is definitely worthy of our invitation."

Well...I knew that interrupting when someone else is happy was not right, but I still have to say it.

"She still hasn't said that she will join..."

I turned to Kuroneko, and asked:

"...What do you think? This club is pretty casual, want to give it a try?"

"...At first look, this place had some decent equipment, with enough freedom. And compare that to, say at home. Making games allows someone to witness my greatness. Not bad..."

Both Miura and Makabe smiled, then nodded.

At the same time, I also laughed inside my heart. That's because I could guess Kuroneko's next words.

"Don't be happy. First, I must remind you that I'm very busy..."

Look, she was trying to hide her embarrassment.

So, every week, I met up with Kuroneko in the club room twice.

Kuroneko looked like she was really busy, while I was on my last year, so twice per week was our maximum limit. Oh, and regarding our original purpose, to help Kuroneko make some new friends, we failed at that.

This club had no female members. To make friends, the best choice should be the same gender and age. But Kuroneko was so anti-social that I had to help her.

One day, after we left the club room, I asked her:

"How are your classmates?"

"...Who knows? I don't even remember what they looked like."

That's why she didn't have any friends.

...No choice then. I reverted back to the usual choice.

You ask what is the "usual choice"? Of course, this meant – ask someone else for help.

Luckily, I had the perfect person for this job.

So, after lunch break, I met with "this guy".

"What? Are there any female members in our club?"

"Yes. You must know that, don't you?"

Of course, I was asking Makabe.

"Why do you ask that? Want to hit on another girl? You already have such a beautiful girlfriend."

"What? Girlfriend?"

"I mean Gokou-chan, of course? Am I wrong?"

His answer caught me off guard, so I was unable to reply immediately.

"No...no. Wait, do we look like a couple?"

"Yes, you do."

So we looked like a couple? That's how we appear to others?

"Let's talk about something else. About my question..."

"I understand. You are worried that being surrounded by so many males, Gokou-san will feel uncomfortable?"

He was really smart. Talking with him was so easy.

"In that case, we do have another female. Akagi, first year."

"...Akagi?"

"Yes. A glasses girl, named Akagi Sena. I once mentioned that besides Gokou-san, we had another very good member, and that is Akagi-san. Er...is something wrong?"

"No, nothing..."

Strange...where have I heard this name before...?

"Was this girl inside the club room when we were there?"

"No, she wasn't."

"I see. Is there anyone else? She doesn't have to be a first year."

"No. Girls in general don't like games much..."

"I see..."

In other words, I need to make sure Kuroneko meets with this girl – who I feel like I've already heard of somewhere...

"By the way, what kind of girl is she?"

"You mean Akagi-san? Well...how should I put it...at first glance she is nothing like an otaku."

"But...the way you said it makes it sound like, she is an otaku. What about her gaming skills? Must be good, isn't she?"

"Well, that is true, but..."

Makabe made a wry smile.

"She is very good at playing games, but she never talks about gaming. Even if she shows up at the club, all she does is reading or focusing on her laptop. Sometimes I wonder why she agreed to join our club."

"She is anti-social?"

"Yes – our club doesn't have any other female members, so maybe she is afraid of us?"

I understood why Makabe tried to invite Kuroneko to join.

Not only because she was good at games, he also hoped that this Akagi girl can make a friend.

In other words, our goals were the same, weren't they?

"Whether it is Akagi or Gokou, it would be good if they can become friends, don't you agree?"

"True..."

Now, we had a good understanding of our current situation. Next was trying to find a solution.

“I got an idea. Hear me out, senpai.”

“Hmm?”

“Have you heard about our welcoming party?”

“I remembered the president mentioning it before.”

“We sometimes hold a party for newcomers. How about we let Gokou and Akagi sit at the same table? After a little chit chat, they should become friends, right?”

I think this was impossible. You've totally overestimated Kuroneko’s social skill.

If you wanted that plan to work, then you need someone to stay nearby.

“I think this is not a bad idea.”

“Let’s do it then.”

“All right. Thanks for your help.”

“No problem senpai. This is for our beautiful junior.”

This day, after school ended, I went home with Manami. Normally we met Kuroneko on the way, so this has become a route line.

She always had to hurry home, so if we waited at the school gate, there is a high chance we would meet her.

We were on the way toward the first floor, but then we met Kuroneko at the staircase leading to the second floor. But she was not preparing to go home.

She was sweeping the floor.

“Is today your turn for duty?”

“Yes…”

She spared us a glance, then kept sweeping. From the way she was doing it, she was quite familiar with this work.

“Where are the others?”

Manami asked.

But Kuroneko ignored Manami, focusing on her job.

Uuu – I paused for a moment, then turned to Manami:

"Please wait here for a while."

I went down the stairs, then continued through a pathway to another staircase.

After I made it to the second floor, I turned and walked back to where Kuroneko and Manami were waiting.

...As I feared.

"Kyou-chan? Where did you just go?"

"Nothing – let's go."

Leaving Kuroneko behind, we left the scene.

After I made sure we were out of earshot, I said:

"Manami...ah."

"Uh?"

The area that those first-years are tasked to take care of is two staircases. One of them was where Kuroneko was working.

"I just checked the other staircase. No one was there."

"Ah..."

Manami already realized, she looked worried.

In other words, the other first-years dumped everything on Kuroneko and went home.

In fact, things could have been worse. At least there was no bullying – yet.

Maybe they thought that it was too much trouble and tried to play a little prank on one anti-social classmate – or at least, I hoped they didn't have any ill intentions. Compared to other kinds of bullying that I knew, this was quite minor.

I did tell Kuroneko that she couldn't just keep avoiding people, so this was her own fault to begin with. But even that –

“Wait here Kyou-chan. I will get broom and dustpan.”

“Thank you.”

Sometimes, I felt that Manami can see through me.

So, while Kuroneko swept her staircase, we helped in the other.

When we were almost finished, Kuroneko appeared.

When she saw us, her eyes widened, then turned quite ferocious.

“What are you doing?”

“Sweeping the staircase.”

I tried to keep my face straight.

Seems like acting like nothing happened would upset her even more. Her voice hardened.

“..... Are you sympathizing with me?"

“What are you saying?”

"Don't play dumb! You saw me sweeping alone and decide to join in? Mind your own business!"

I already guessed she would say that, so I started from this staircase.

"Sorry sorry! But we are already done. Can you forgive me this time?"

"Okay..."

Biting her lower lip, Kuroneko answered. Her ego made her uncomfortable when accepting other people's kindness. If Saori were here, she could even tease her, but I couldn't do that. So I could only apologize.

But... I didn't expect her to get angry.

"I won't thank you."

"Of course. We did this by our own will."

Kuroneko closed her eyes. After a few minute, she asked in a small voice:

"I'm really worried about you – you once said that to me, didn't you?"

"Yes. Totally right."

"Yes. I know. But...have you wondered where that feeling come from? Or...did you notice, but pretended like you didn't?"

What is she trying to say?

An invisible force made me unable to look into her eyes.

"...I didn't intend to say it out loud, but I can't take it anymore, so listen!"

From above, she proudly pointed her finger at me, and said:

"You worried about me, because the one you're usually concerned about – your sister – is not here. Coincidentally, there is a girl her age, and she looks troubled. Because she looked like she may depend on you, you worried about her. That's everything about it!"

After saying that, Kuroneko turned around –

"I am not a replacement for your sister. Don't look down on me!"

She left.

Today was Friday. We intended to make our welcoming party today.

After class ended, I went to find Kuroneko. Because of what happened earlier, I was worried that she might skip this party.

In fact, after that happened, I didn't even meet Kuroneko once.

"I am not a replacement for your sister", huh?

I thought this line was something only a manga character could say.

But...the truth was...her words pierced my heart.

She was right. I had begun to consider Kuroneko as my little sister too. That's why I started to care for her.

But I still thought that the few months after a new school year was the most important time for a student. This is when they decided to join a club, make some friends...stuff like that.

And if you failed, your time in school would be very difficult.

Of course, I was fine with my situation, but as a high school student, I was also aware of this problem.

That's why I was worried about Kuroneko. This was my true feelings, without lie.

But was that all? Was that my entire reason for being worried about her?

Probably not.

I stuck my nose into Kuroneko's problem because –

I don't expect her to say thank you, but I wanted help her – because...

Kuroneko's lonely figure and this girl's shadow overlapped.

Even though she was no longer here, I'm still unconsciously trying to help her.

I still remembered that happy feeling when she depended on me, but now...

Maybe that's why I...

"Ah...I'm so hopeless..."

...Besides, she completely saw through me.

But this didn't matter. Either way, I would do what I had to do.

Although I felt embarrassed because she found out about my motive, I still wanted to help her. Not to mention my promise to Saori.

Even if I was not sure of my own feelings, I was sure of "what I had to do" and "what I wanted to do" now.

"All right. Let's do it."

Bracing myself, I noticed that the first-years' classes were already in front of me.

Class had ended, students had started to go home. What if she avoided me...?

I tried to shake those thoughts, and opened the class door.

Not here.

"Haizzzz."

I shook my head. There was no time to waste. I need to follow her now.

I harshly turned around –

"Wahhhh!"

I almost jumped in shock. Because Kuroneko was right in front of me. Her emotionless face almost touched mine .

"...Sneaking around a first-year classroom like a perverted old man..."

"Ah."

Was she still angry? She always spoke in this tone, so I couldn't guess her mood.

"About..."

What should I tell her? I had prepared a lot of apologizes beforehand, but now I couldn't remember any of them.

While I was still trying to figure out what to say, Kuroneko turned her back towards me, throwing back a cold glare.

"Hm. Hurry up."

She started walking away. I hurried and caught up with her.

Looks like she was on her way to the welcoming party.

Although I'm already familiar with her, right now – I couldn't guess what she was thinking.

Of course, our welcoming party wasn't held inside our club room. We asked to borrow an empty classroom for this. Added some snacks and drinks, but that was all.

Compared to some of the other parties that I attended, this was quite small.

But that was because all of my previous parties were led by Saori.

That led to my "normal" definition, which was a bit different from others.

When I was about to catch up with Kuroneko, I told her:

"Ah – I'm relieved that you're willing to join in our party. I though you hated crowds."

"Of course I hate crowds. Especially parties like this."

Still looking forward, she didn't even look at me.

I was about to ask "Then why did you still decide to come?", but she interrupted me:

"Because this club's environment is good. Much better than making a game on my own, in fact. So at least I will try to cooperate with them."

"I understand..."

I estimated half of what she just said is the truth.

But this was not all – I believed she had another reason .

“Ah...I think Kuroneko is not angry. If I were her, I would say one or two harsh line. All you need to do is apologize to her later, and she will probably forgive you. ”

That was what Saori told me when I spoke with her a few days earlier.

I was not sure what Saori meant when she said “If I were Kuroneko”, but this was not important.

It meant Kuroneko had ‘another reason’.

Didn't she?

“...”

After she got to the door, still facing that way, she ordered me:

“Go in.”

"Yes madam."

I changed my place with Kuroneko, and opened the door.

There were already a lot of members inside. They were making final preparations, like rearranging tables and chairs, splitting drinks... After a quick greeting, we joined in too.

This is the first time I had seen so many people in this group. Looks like even some ghost members were here too.

After everything was ready, everyone moved to their seats.

I just chose a random spot, and Kuroneko quickly sat down next to me.

"Is something wrong?"

"Nothing..."

Kuroneko was afraid of strangers, so even if she was still angry, she would sit next to me. But...where is that Sena girl?

I checked around until I found a glasses girl, which I assumed was Sena.

Compare to girls her age, she was tall. A bit thin, with developed breasts that gave out a mature feeling.

Short, natural red hair, so she didn't seem too rigid. Girl-like glasses. All in all, a cute girl.

But her expression was saying "I'm in a bad mood".

Makabe seemed to give up, and he told her:

"Akagi-san, there is a seat over here."

"A...ah."

Sena glared this way...

"You are right, please wait."

She sat down in a seat between me and Makabe.

In other words, from the left was Kuroneko, me, Sena, Makabe, big guy, president, another big guy...

I didn't expect to be sandwiched between two girls. Well, this could work too.

"All right, everyone. Let's start."

Makabe took a look around, then announced. Some gave their greetings too, and then everything went back to normal.

"First, our president has something to say."

"Everyone, thank you for gathering here today. I hope we can get along this year – cheers!"

After that, whispers could be heard from every corner of the room.

I took a look at everyone. Of course they are more or less otakus, but in my eyes, which have seen Comiket or cosplay parties, they were nothing.

Of course, maybe they still had to obey the rules and wear their uniforms.

But everyone was talking about otaku-related topics. So that's how they gathered huh.

And about Kuroneko...

"..."

She remained silent, not eating anything, just looking around.

She...really hated this kind of atmosphere. I got a bad feeling when I heard the word "party". Added in the fact that she also hated crowds, I planned to help her with conversation. At least until she got a friend.

The best example was Kirino. After she left, Kuroneko seemed so lonely. She looked emotionless outside, but inside she was still a girl.

"So..."

What next then?

I took a peek at Sena. No matter what she did, as long as Kuroneko kept her "Don't come near me" aura, she wouldn't respond. I need to lure her into talking with Kuroneko.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Kousaka, third year."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Akagi, first year."

"I see."

Seems OK so far.

This girl didn't look like she was an otaku. Although she is cute, she is unlike any of Kirino's friends.

If this was an eroge, then she would definitely be a " class rep".

"Is something wrong?"

"Nothing, I just noticed that you don't seem happy."

"I'm always like this."

"Ah... I see."

So hard to hold a conversation!

Looking at my troubled face, Sena seemed embarrassed. At least she was unlike Kuroneko, who always maintained her emotionless face.

"Ah...I'm not really in a good mood. I can't bring myself to like this club."

"Why?"

"Why? First, because all those filthy men made me want to vomit. Second, they called themselves game research club, but in fact they all spend time on random pointless chit chat. And third, they openly brought eroges and figures to their club room."

Sena flipped her fingers while speaking. And I was unable to say anything back.

"So why did you join?"

I asked her the first question that came to my mind. Maybe Makabe kept bugging her, and she didn't want to refuse? No, if she was capable of saying those cruel words, then refusal should be easy.

So why?

"Because I wanted to learn programming design."

"Programming design?"

Sena seemed upset because I kept asking, and answered:

“The game that president made is quite professional, so I can’t help but ask how exactly he did it. After I found out that he could do everything from composing music to creating level maps, I decided to join.”

“After that, I found out that...true, there were plenty of good equipment in the club, but...they are so messed up... Still, I think I made the right choice."

So, similarly to Kuroneko, this girl liked the club’s equipment and decided to join.

If this was Kuroneko, she would use the same reason to hide her shyness.

But what about Sena?

She could beat that game too, so did this mean she also liked games?

Yet she didn’t look like an otaku at all.

“There is another reason that I can’t stand it anymore...”

"What is that?"

"Complete lack of rules and discipline."

"Like this messed up room, those loud ones, those lazy ones, those filthy ones, not to mention that sometime they steal things – I hate them all!"

Where did I hear that line before?

Ah...So not only did she look like a "class rep", she also acted like one?

"You're right..."

"Thank you – that's why I said I can't stand it anymore . This club is too casual. Among them, there are only a handful of people seriously doing something. Not to mention our president hasn't bathed in a while..."

She drank her cup, then continued:

"That's why I can't let it continue this way."

I thought I got it. This girl not only acted like a class rep, she also had a housekeeper mindset. She would put her nose into anything that she considered "not good enough". What a troublesome girl.

She definitely told her classmate to "clean everything carefully" when she was in elementary.

"Huh? Why are you looking at me?"

"Ah, no, nothing."

I didn't dare speak with her again. Need to change topic, quick!

"You don't look like an otaku. In fact, you don't look like someone who is interested in games."

"Ah, that's because..."

Sena looked away, rearrange her glasses, and spoke:

"That's good to hear. Because I never considered myself the same as them."

I felt a little angry, meaning that I'm already an otaku.

Besides, that line...I have heard this before, from my own sister.

So I asked her:

“Does your family know that you joined this club?”

“I never have to hide it. Well...I don’t go boast about it either, but...even if they found out, there won’t be any problems.”

“Is that so?”

Where did her confidence come from?

“Aren't you worried about someone founding out and considering you an otaku?”

“I will deny it. If they ask my reason for joining, I will answer ‘programming design’. I don’t really care if someone called me an otaku though.”

“I’m surprised.”

I thought she hated otaku, but this? This is getting more and more complicated.

For now, let's just remember what she said first.

Suddenly, Sena changed into a cheerful voice:

"For example, recently there is some anime with 'girl with hidden otaku hobby'. All of them are exaggerated. In real life, you can't get into trouble just because you like anime or games. In fact, people even go to the cinema to watch anime."

So she was saying that otaku are now more accepted than before? So it was good news for otaku, right? Just...

"What about eroge? Do you talk about that too?"

"Of course –"

Closing her eyes, she said:

"It depends on its severity. What eroge you like is one thing, talking about them in a public meeting is another."

Kirino once said the same thing. That's the reason she had to hide her otaku self in school. Although unlike Kirino, Sena still had to consider who she will talk to before saying anything. In other words, she sets a limit on how much she can talk.

Well, for a middle school otaku, that was probably the best choice.

"In my opinion, people don't hate otaku because they are otaku. Otaku are hated because they normally have many unpleasant factors. For example..."

She clearly noticed my surroundings, but she continued:

"For example, some people keep acting strangely wherever they are. Those are the worst."

"..."

Kuroneko probably could hear that, but she remained motionless.

Woo, the atmosphere was really heavy.

Huh...? Could it be that I...messed up?

Maybe...

"If you want to live long, you should watch your surroundings before saying anything."

"...Ah, Gokou-san. So you re here too! Your existence is so small, I didn't notice you until now –"

"What did you just call me? Use my real name!"

"I don't understand what are you saying. Real name? So boring, right, Gokou-san? By the way, are you okay? How many times do you want me to repeat my line?"

"Hm. My real name is Kuroneko. No matter what you call me, my soul will not respond."

"...Your stupidity made it impossible for me to reply..."

Hey, you two...

"You two already know each other?"

My eyes darted between them –

"...Hm, she is the most annoying girl in my class."

"...She is the biggest problem child in my class."

So...both of them hate each other.

...What the hell? I heard that both she and Kuroneko are first-years –

I glared at Makabe. He seemed to be lost too.

Okay, first, I need to stop them –

Learning from Saori's experience, I interrupted them before they began quarreling.

"Wait. Stop!"

"Hm. I never wanted to talk with her."

"That's my line."

I could imagine sparks flying where their eyes met.

I should defuse the situation, quickly! But my mind was blank, unable to think of anything.

Luckily, Makabe lent me a hand.

"Gokou-san, Akagi-san. Since you two both joined our club, why don't you try to befriend each other?"

"..I'm very sorry senpai, but when I found out that she is in the same club, I wanted to lecture her even more. She is a weirdo in my class. From her actions, her manner of speaking. She also ignores every classmate with her very blunt way of speaking. I have never seen anyone that horrible. Everyone said that during lunch break, she must go to the toilet to eat."

Please stop that will you? I wanna cry!

"So that is it? A fancy way of saying I will bring trouble to you because we are in the same club. Don't worry, I also hate being in the same club with you."

Kuroneko stood up with moisture in her eyes.

"Hey wait –"

I immediately pushed Kuroneko's shoulder down.

"Calm down first, please."

"Yes, Gokou-san. Did I say you bring 'trouble'?"

Hm? What is that girl trying to say?

Sena stood in triumph, and looked at Kuroneko.

"Since we are in the same club, this is the chance for me to guide you back to the righteous path. So, if you run away now, this would definitely be a problem."

Everyone was speechless. After about ten seconds, Kuroneko hesitated, then asked:

"...Who asked you to do it?"

"No one. I decided that on my own. But first, keep in mind that I'm not doing it because of good will or friendship. I just can't stand people like you."

Although what she said was harsh, I was not in any position to blame her.

We have different motives, but in the end what we planned to do for Kuroneko was the same.

"..."

The room was filled with immeasurable tension. No one said anything, until…

Pop ~~~~

Everyone turned toward the source.

"Ah, sorry. I accidentally farted!"

President raised his hand in apology.

"G...gross!"

Sena eyes turned into > < shape, and then she looked at the president with murderous eyes.

However, unlike usual, Makabe didn't criticize the president.

Maybe that's an intended action to break up those two.

Although it stinks.

Makabe opened a window, and then turned to Sena.

"That's troublesome. I thought you two would quickly become good friends, but..."

"What? Senpai meant me and Gokou?"

"Yes. Both of you are so good at gaming. I'm not 100% sure, but I think you two are about equal."

After he said that, both Sena and Kuroneko had an 'I can't believe it' expression. I don't know about Sena, but I know that Kuroneko was thinking 'Equal? With me?'

'...Makabe senpai, does that mean Gokou-san is as good as me in gaming?"

"Yes. Akagi is good at predicting the situation, but Gokou's reaction time is on par with Matsudo Black Cat[1], almost godlike."

"It's definitely an exaggeration!"

Sena interrupted.

"Is it?"

"I think it is rude to compare him to a middle school student. Makabe-senpai, you shouldn't praise her with unbelievable words like that."

"Ah...ha ha, sorry. Akagi. Sorry."

Look like Sena is fond of this Matsudo guy.

"..."

Kuroneko just kept quiet, listening to their conversation.

What the heck? Are they still talking about games? Should we choose a topic where they won't quarrel again ?

But I didn't think quarreling was a bad thing. The first time Kirino and Kuroneko met – no, every time they met, they would quarrel. Yet, in the end, they had become good friends. Because both of them wanted a friend, someone they could share their hobby with.

After Kirino left, Kuroneko lost someone to quarrel against. And now Sena stubbornly refused to accept her – was this exactly what Kuroneko needed right now?

When the party ended, Kuroneko and Sena still hadn't become friends. I didn't think that today was useless, but it was too soon to expect any results. Better wait for a while now.

We were now cleaning the room.

Sena was both ordering everyone around and cleaning at the same time.

"Senpai, please gather every garbage in there. Anyone who finished their job can go home. I can take care of the rest."

For a middle school girl to stay behind and clean so that her senpai could go home first – normally this attitude might be very impressive, but in my eyes it seemed like a housewife who was eager to clean up everything while forcing her husband away.

"Sorry, Akagi. I'm still president. I need to stay here until the end."

Sena gave him a broom.

"Then please help."

"No problem."

Sena then turned to me.

"Hey hey, Kousaka-senpai. What are you doing, standing there? If you want to help, then at least focus on your task."

"Ah, sorry."

This girl was really familiar with giving orders.

But maybe this was a good chance.

Now, there were only me, president, Kuroneko, Makabe and Sena.

To me, they were all trustworthy. These were the perfect conditions to use my last trump card.

"I thought that Gokou was always busy. You can leave if you want to."

"...Today I'm free. Leave or stay is my business."

A black cloud seems to appear out of nowhere.

In the past...when Kuroneko and Kirino first met, they quickly realized that the other was very similar to themselves. But that's because they both directly said

what was on their minds. Of course Akagi Sena wasn't Kousaka Kirino. But even with that, I thought that reusing how Kirino and Kuroneko became friends should still be effective.

That's why I prepared a trump card. The only problem was that Sena was not Kirino – she didn't have any reason to open up with Kuroneko.

In other words, she didn't have any reason to show her true self to Kuroneko.

...If this continued, then my plan wouldn't work.

I needed to somehow trick them into talking with each other.

"Hmm... How about..."

I was not sure it would work, but there was no harm in trying.

Let's just give it a try.

I moved closer to Sena and then casually asked her:

"Hey, Sena..."

"Yes?"

"Just now you said that you joined here to learn programing, so what about gaming? You don't play games?"

"Yes, I do... I like playing games too."

"I think so too. I heard that you are pretty good with games, right?"

"Please stop beating around the bush. What are you trying to say, senpai?"

Was I that easy to read?

I gave her a wry smile, and asked:

"You once said that if your friend asked 'Why did you join this club?', you will answer 'To learn programing', right?"

"Yes, so?"

"But I felt that this is just an excuse, not your real reason."

I focused my attention on her eyes.

"Is it not?"

Biting her lower lip, Sena let out a sigh.

"Ah – Sorry. Forget what I said. I didn't intend to hide it, but I do have another reason. Learning programing...is only half of my reason."

"Only half?"

What did that mean?

"...I...I want to become a game designer."

"Game designer? You mean like the ones who actually make games?"

"Yes. I hope I can get into a big company."

"That's why you want to learn programing?"

"...Yeah, like that..."

After she said that, Sena turned away, avoided my gaze. She probably felt embarrassed about her dream.

I could understand her feelings. So I smiled and nodded with her.

"So that's... Ah... Ha ha...your gaming skill must not be just 'normal' right?"

"Yes – I admit, I like games very much. From playing to designing games."

She was blushing now. Kind of cute, I thought.

I continued:

"Do you know about a game called 'Homoge Club'?"

"It's an amazing, super awesome game!"

.....For real?

"– Please forget that I said that!"

"Sorry, but I already heard it..."

"Auuuu..."

This was the first time I had seen Sena like this. Thanks to my friend Akagi Kouhei's intel "My little sister is a

fujoshi", "My sister is a first year, wearing glasses" and the fact that they looked a bit like each other, I figured out this is her.

"...You...you...what are you talking about? I don't understand what you are saying."

But after just a few seconds, she already recovered and acted like nothing happened.

"Ara ara...I didn't expect my class rep had those tastes. .."

"Didn't you listen to me, Gokou-san? I have no interest in such things"

"So why are you running away? Is it...because we are right?"

"Didn't you see me deny such a claim just now? I can't believe you, Gokou-san."

Although Sena tried to counterattack, her opponent was not someone who would let this chance go.

"Thank you for you compliment."

Look, she was taunting Sena on purpose.

"Ahhhhh!"

Sena looked at me and Kuroneko with hateful eyes – I guessed that she was thinking, 'How did this guy know my secret?'

Sorry, blame your brother. His big mouth told me everything about you.

Of course, I couldn't say that out, so I remained silent. At the same time, Kuroneko showed an unpleasant, happy smile.

She probably thought 'Now, how should I mock her next?'

I felt kind of sorry for Sena because I was the one who brought that up. I didn't think that it would end up like this. Beside, why did she announce her hobby so loudly like that?

Kuroneko licked her lips, and then – like a devil – whispered to Sena:

"I have only heard about it, but I heard Maschera is getting pretty popular lately."

"Huh...huh? Ma...Maschera? What are you talking about?"

"Cerberos Astaros, Lucifer, Shinya. The dark, handsome prince of the Netherworld. A relationship between an overlord and a human is a good source a BL[2]'s story. The most common theme is how they interacted with each other. In this case it is the love and harted between Shinya and Lucifer, isn't it?"

"What the heck are you talking about? I don't understand a single word. Stop talking nonsense."

"...Hm...Don't play dumb! You were shrieking in joy those nights fantasizing about that Shinya X Lucifer coupling, weren't you?"

"You fool!"

With flashing eyes, Sena roared:

"The cute seme X tsundere uke of Lucifer X Shinya is the essence of Maschera! Reversing that coupling? Impossible! Fake! You are not a fujoshi!"

Hey... What just happened? Everything was fine just now, but...why did she react like that? I was sure that no one said anything about fujoshi, much less about their sensitive spot.

I took a look around, only to find out that both president and Makabe were looking with their mouths wide open. And Kuroneko was smiling.

"Of course I know that. Reversing or breaking that coupling is impossible. But it looks like you tripped, at last."

Sena hastily covered her mouth with her hand.

"Heh..."

Still having an unpleasant smile, Kuroneko looked at Sena with an expression that said 'Blame your own mouth'. Of course, I had no idea what they just talk about.

Like any Kirino-Kuroneko conversation, this one also had a lot of anime-related words.

“You...you tricked me!”

“I tricked you? What are you talking about? ...This is your hobby, and you said it yourself. What about rules? Are we any different?“

“Of course! We are very different. I can’t reveal my interests! So what? I like homo! I’m completely rotten! But I hide it, so it won’t affect anyone!”

...We are still in school, you know.

However, Sena is completely in excited mode.

Kuroneko deadpanned:

“...Is that so? If you are so rotten, then I’m sure you can even fantasize about half-real things like the Prince of Tennis musical?”

"Too easy! I'm not boasting, but I have a very good imagination. Half real or 2D or inanimate, so long as they brush against my heartstrings, I can save them in my mind and fantasize. As an example, I can take a fork and a spoon and draw out some form of love."

"I commend your confidence. But do you even fantasize about real men?"

"I have nothing to hide. Just last night, I had a dream where Makabe-senpai was gang raped by the other club members!"

This girl was unbelievable.

Even Kuroneko, who used her knowledge about fujoshi to lead Sena here also took a step back, her eyes widening in shock. I noticed she also broke into a cold sweat.

"Oh...I...I can't believe you hold such evil thoughts..."

Even Kuroneko didn't expect that Sena is so rotten.

Didn't this girl prefer everything clean? What could she fantasize about with a fork and a spoon?

Looking at them, president said in a trembling voice:

“Ma...Makabe...You have reeled in an absolutely terrifying pervert into our club!”

“.....”

Makabe didn’t answer, his eyes unfocused, his body frozen.

And the next moment, after she realized that she told everyone about her fantasies during her excited rant, Sena...

“
Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
!!!!!”

Holding her head, she screamed.

“Cough! Cough!”

Sena tried to block her throat.

With teary eyes, she tried to explain to Makabe.

“No no Makabe-senpai. This – this is a mistake!”

"..."

Makabe was unable to answer, due to the fact that he already turned into a soulless body. Sena held his shoulder, and said:

"Sorry! Sorry Makabe-senpai! I'm sorry I fantasized about you and the president going out! Because I couldn't hear your polite voice as anything but tsundere! I think it's so moe! And I also think that the president still hasn't graduated because he loves you, and he doesn't want to separate from you!"

"Hey hey stop! Stop! Don't cause him any deeper trauma than you already have!"

"Hmm? Did I just say anything gross again?"

"You said a lot!"

"Ah... Ah... So what. Next I will fantasize about the president X Kousaka-senpai!"

"Are you doing this on purpose?"

I silently prayed for my safety.

...No wonder Makabe turned into a soulless body! This is so gross!

"Please don't. Just don't think anything about me!"

"Aaaaaaah! I did it again! Kill me! Kill me already!"

Sena covered her head and screamed "Kill me" repeatedly.

I felt like this is part of my responsibly too, but... What could I do? Is this what a fujoshi is really like?

I prayed that Sena is a special case...but now that I think about it, I couldn't help but respect Akagi. If I were you, I would have killed myself.

Right! Akagi! He is the only one who can defuse the situation now!

I pulled out my cellphone, hoping that Sena's brother had some solution.

...Ring...ring...ring...

"Kousaka? What is it? I'm kind of busy right now..."

"Your little sister has gone mad! What can we do now?"

"Tell her 'Sena-chan, you are so cute. Sena-chan, it is not your fault' until she calms down!"

"I get it! Your head is screwed up too!"

How could I say that?

Both those sister-brother are crazy.

"...I will give her my phone now, try to calm her down for me."

"Okay. Give it to her."

After Akagi agreed to help, I silently went to Sena and raised my phone in front of her.

"Your brother."

"Ohhhhh..."

As soon as she heard 'brother', Sena came back to her sense.

She took her glasses off, brought my phone to her ear, and whispered:

"Onii-chan?"

Onii-chan huh?

We had a bit in common, but that's a big different between me and these siblings.

"..Yes...yes...Our club...Welcoming party...Yes..."

While choking her tears, Sena told her brother everything. From her voice, I knew that she totally trusted Akagi – but...somehow, I felt hurt. For Sena, her brother is someone she could take off her mask, and become a spoiled little girl for.

"...Uhm...I know...Thank you...Sorry...Do your best, Onii-chan."

After that, she hung up and returned my cell phone.

"About...just now. Sorry to show you such a scene..."

"No, that's..."

We couldn't just act like nothing happened. But...at least she had calmed down.

Taking a deep breath, Sena asked me:

"Kousaka-senpai...are you a good friend of my Onii-chan?"

"Yeah, kind of. We have been classmates for a long time."

"I see..."

So what – suddenly, Sena let out a mysterious smile.

"Hey, what did you just fantasize about? This can't be. ..that horrible scene...isn't it?"

I couldn't stand this girl anymore!

After everyone calmed down...

Still blushing, Sena apologized to everyone:

"...Sorry. This is my bad habit..."

"I can see that. I'm also sorry for tricking you. I won't speak about it again."

"Me too."

"I didn't see anything."

Both Makabe and the president agree with me. I glared at Kuroneko...

"You too."

"...Okay okay, I know."

Although she seemed unwilling, I knew that if we don 't say anything, Kuroneko will not speak about it too.

That's how our welcoming party ended.

But Kuroneko was still unable to get a friend.

Looks like I needed to keep brainstorming.

I went home together with Kuroneko.

We didn't say anything on our way back. Just kept walking.

I recalled the conversation between Sena and Kuroneko just now.

First, Sena was clearly a fujoshi.

But she could quickly recover, and then she will feel shame and regret about her actions.

They fiercely argued with each other, but unlike Kirino , they didn't have the same interests.

I should have expected that. Akagi Sena was not Kousaka Kirino, after all.

Just like Kuroneko couldn't become my little sister's replacement, Sena couldn't become Kuroneko's good friend's substitute. I couldn't force it upon her, otherwise she would be angry just like before.

Hesitantly, I said:

"Sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?"

Kuroneko coldly replied. She really hadn't forgiven me.

I could only bite the bullet now. Speaking was not my good point anyway, so I could only try to express myself as much as I could.

"I admit it. I felt lonely because my sister is not here anymore."

"I see."

I realized it now. No matter how much I denied it, or didn't realize it myself, the truth was, I felt lonely. That's why I was drawn to this girl who called me "Onii-chan". That's why I considered her my sister, tried to help her, and at the same time tried to fill my empty heart.

I was so embarrassed right now. I hated my little sister – I still hate her now, damn it!

But...even if I hate her, no…because I hate her...

That's why when she suddenly disappeared, the impact was much bigger than I thought.

I let out another sigh.

“Even with the way she is, I felt lonely without her.”

“I see.”

We stopped talking. But I thought we were both thinking about the same thing.

Because my feelings and Kuroneko’s toward Kirino were the same.

We tried to look different ways, and I whispered:

“I...I’m worried about you. So, I’m going to keep sticking my nose into your problems.”

“Whatever. I don’t care anymore!”

“Can I ask you one thing? Do you not call me ‘ Onii-chan’ anymore because you don’t want to become Kirino’s substitute?”

“No. I stopped calling you that while your sister was still here, remember?”

Yeah, that’s true.

"So why?"

"There is no special meaning. If I must say one…"

"That is?"

"I just wanted a change of mood."

Character file.10

Ge[illegible] Miura

三浦絃之介

【みうら・げんのすけ】

◆ゲーム研究会の部長。
2次元美少女とクソゲーを愛する筋金入りのオタク。

◆性別:男
◆年齢:?歳
◆身長:179cm
◆体重:58Kg
◆3サイズ:————

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Character file.11

Sena Akagi

赤城瀬菜

【あかぎ・せな】

◆赤城浩平の妹で、黒猫のクラスメイト。
やや潔癖性で、クラスでは委員長を務める。
感情が昂ると……?

◆性別:女
◆年齢:15歳
◆身長:163cm
◆体重:48Kg
◆3サイズ:89/58/83

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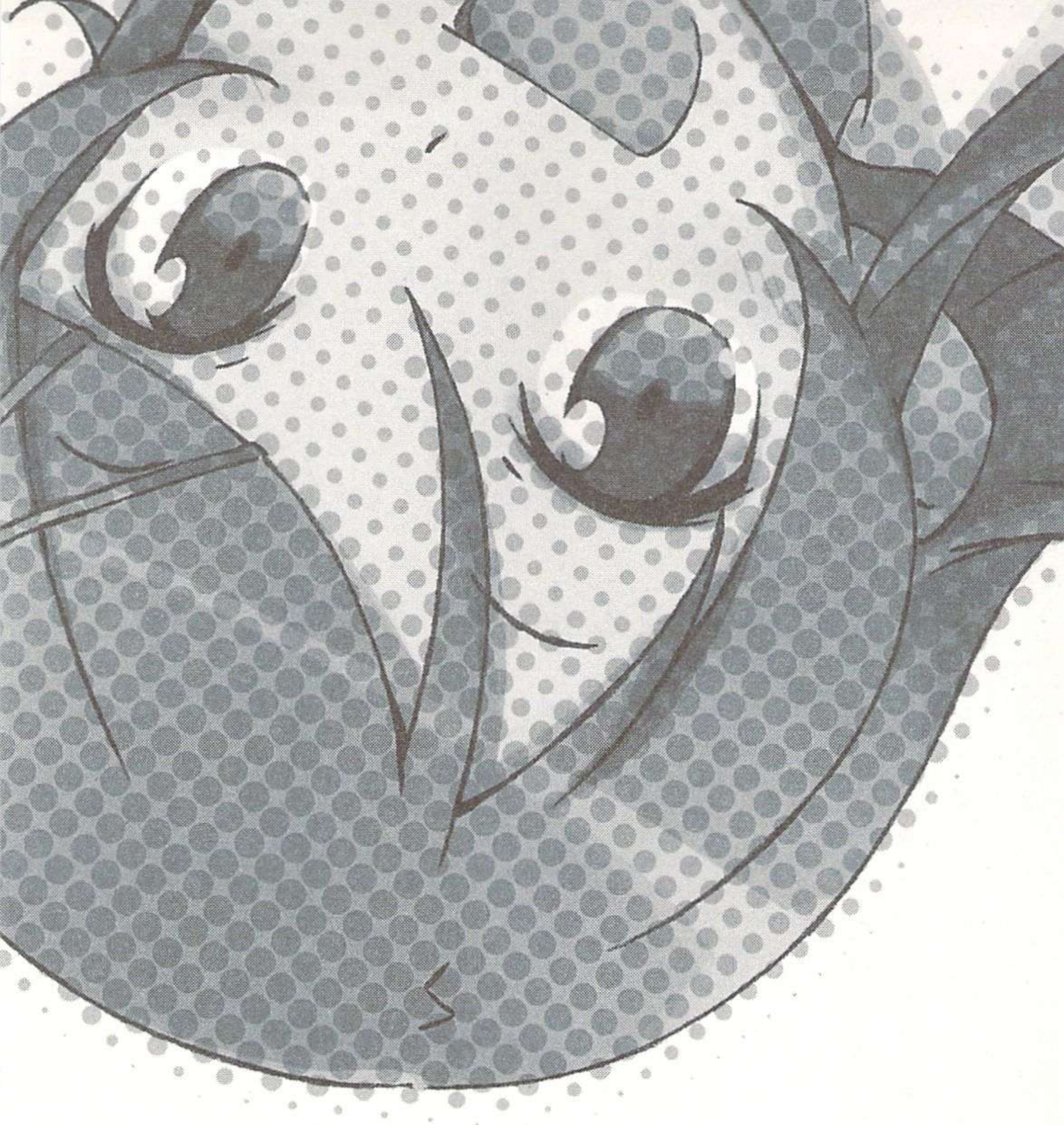
Chapter 3



第三章

"The two first years are going to make a game together ."

This was what the president said.

Hearing that, both Kuroneko and Sena glared at each other.

"Why do I have to work with her?"

Both of them showed obvious signs of discomfort.

By the way, everyone agreed to pretend that Sena's accident didn't happen.

"Because of our club's rule."

"…President? Did you just make this up?"

"Lie."

Both of them voiced their complaints. Why were they only united at times like this?

"Yes, I made that up."

Miura acknowledged. Of course, how could our free-for-all club have that kind of strict rule.

The president continued:

"But I think you should consider it. There are two reasons, first to test your ability and practice team work. But the second reason is that you two always quarrel with each other, so as president, I have to do something about it."

"But…."

"We are a pretty lax club. But you two still want to make a game, don't you? And to make a game, you need to work as a team. Got it?"

"…Yes."

"..Hm…"

Sena unwillingly nodded, while Kuroneko folded her arms, didn't say anything.

Amazing. He could convince those two.

Not only does he have a good reason, he also clearly understood Kuroneko and Sena's reason to be here. In my first time here, he said he wanted to create some place for everyone to learn about games, so that everyone can practice making games.

"Next month, there will be a game creation contest – Chaos Create. I intend to send your game to participate."

"Of course there is no need to worry. Although we won't help you, but if there is any trouble we can give you advice."

Makabe added, probably to ease their worry.

The president concluded:

"That's all. Both of you give it some thought, write it out and bring it here the next Monday. By the way, how about each of you make half of the game? You can share your ideas."

"But what if I and Gokou-san have different ideas…"

"We can't afford to make two games. In Monday, after each of you presents your idea, we will vote what game our club will make."

"…Hm... I see… A vote, hmm…"

Sena looked around. There are seven people here, me included.

"All right. I accept."

"..No problem."

Both of them agreed on using majority vote to decide the winner.

Because I had an idea, so I raised my hand:

"President."

"What, Kousaka?"

"Do you mind if I help out? I'm still technically a member, right?"

"Ummmm"

The president looks at me and gave me an understanding smile.

"Okay. Give it a try. Oh right, if you can, please be their supervisor."

After that, I went to a bookstore.

If I wanted to help with making a game, then I need to prepare myself.

I don't know how much I can do, but at least I think I should get a few books about this.

Books in our club are too hard to understand, so I have no choice but to go get some beginner's books.

Ah – What a wonderful senpai I am. If everything goes smooth, then my cute junior will admire me more… heheheh….

"Probably around here…"

After a while, I found the bookstore.

And – I meet someone I knew.

"Hm? …Akagi?"

"Oh? Ah—Kousaka senpai?"

Since I surprised her, Sena almost jumped in shock.

Did she also come here after school? She was still in her uniform.

Although it can easily mess up with Akagi my classmate, but I couldn't just call her by name here.

"Er…Senpai…what are you doing here?"

Was it that strange for me to be in a bookstore? Although… I really didn't fit in a bookstore.

"Nah, I just want to grab some beginner's book about game development."

"Ah...yeah…right."

"By the way, do you have any recommendations?"

"Ah…ah…"

Blinking a few times, Sena regaining her usual form, answered:

"No problem – about that… there…around that shelf are beginner's books, you can try from there."

Without hesitation, Sena picked a book and showed it to me.

"Although this book is too simple, there are almost no real examples, so I don't think there is any help…"

I took that book and looked at a few pages, confirmed that I probably won't be able to understand this at the first glance.

"Can you get me another book? Around this level, please."

"Sure – just wondering if you really want to make a game?"

"What do you mean?"

"Because Kousaka-senpai is interested in Gokou-san, not making games, isn't he?"

Look like she is also misunderstanding.

My relationship with her is not like that. The president wanted to take this chance for you two to make up with each other, but at this rate no one can be sure what will happen.

That's why I'm acting as their supervisor.

"I do have some interest in making a game. Beside, as a member of our club, I can't just sit around doing absolutely nothing, right?"

"But to learn about that now is already too late, you will only drag us down."

Direct to the point!

"You…are always that straightforward?"

"You're angry?"

"Nope."

If I became angry from just that then I'd already had a bleeding brain.

Because not long ago, there was a devil much worse than her living in the same house with me.

"In fact, I need to thank you. So, rushing things up is a no-no. Then…how about small things then?"

"…I can't believe Kousaka-senpai is a responsible type ."

"I was just being dragged along with the flow…."

"I see…"

"By the way, are you here to buy books for making games too?"

"Er? No! Not that!"

Sena panicked. And I didn't have to ask "why are you here" anymore…

Because I could clearly see many BL-related books in her hand.

"…You… What is with your expression?"

She blushed, trying to hide her books. Completely different from a certain little sister who happily showed me her eroge.

"You...really like those kinds of books don't you?"

"Is that a problem…"

Still blushing, Sena dropped her head.

"Nothing nothing. It's not like they are R18 right? So you don't need to hide them."

"Kou, Kousaka-senpai...You must approve of homosexuality too, right?"

"Stop your imagination at once! I'm a totally normal male!"

"Why ---"

I glared at her. Sena instantly stopped, and covered her mouth.

"Sorry….I don't know why, whenever I see Kousaka-senpai….I start to fantasize…."

If someone stopped listening here, they might think about a love confession.

But of course, considered that the later part is "I can't stop fantasize about you in a BL setting", no one could felt happy hearing that.

"Ah..whatever…"

"Er? You mean I can continue?"

"Of course not!"

I saw her eyes flashing again! This girl was beyond saving.

"I'm so sad…. You are mean, senpai…"

"…."

I started to feel a headache. What, no how should I reply to this girl?

"About…"

"Hmm?"

"Can I ask – well, what does 'fujoshi' mean? How could I put it…you seems humble when mentioning your hobby, and yet you can openly talk about it, so what is with the sudden lack of confidence?"

"Please, please come over here….!"

"Hmm? Hey…"

Pulling my clothes, Sena dragged me to a corner.

She put me against a wall, after carefully checking the surrounding, whispered:

"Please… Never say that word 'fujoshi' in this kind of place…"

"..Sorry."

I quickly apologized. The truth is her well-developed chest was pushing against me, so I had to distract myself before my body got a reaction.

But isn't it too much? Look, there is almost no one here .

I got a feeling that this is the difference between ‘ fujoshi’ and ‘otaku’.

For example, Kirino had to hide her otaku hobby from her friends, and yet she admitted (with me, at least) that she is an otaku.

While Sena clearly got a bad impression with otaku, she also said she had no such hobby, and tried to conceal that she is a fujoshi.

“Listen to me, Kousaka-senpai. Fujoshi is a word originally born from self-discipline and self-deprecating. ”

Raising a finger, Sena started lecturing me:

“We use that word as a code word during normal conversation or online chats in order to ensure that no bystanders could get into it by accident. Also, we can prevent some innocent from that particular topic.”

Somehow, during her speech, Sena started moving closer and closer to me. Even if she's just a middle school girl, I can’t help but to feel uneasy.

“Kousaka-senpai? Are you listening to me?”

"Huh? Of course…"

I realized that our current posture is not really okay, but I couldn't stop her from talking now.

"Of course, this is just my opinion – but I believe that a definition of fujoshi is based on individual. That's why if we can't get along, we could immediately disband. I don' t think that Kousaka-senpai would understand that, but for us fujoshi, we can only be good friend or nemesis."

No – I don't understand a single word. By the way, your breasts….

"About what you said 'based on individual', can you be more specific?"

"For example, let's talk about the giver and the receiver."

"I feel more and more confuse."

"Huh? Kousaka-senpai? Could it be that you don't know any BL language?"

"Of course not! I have absolutely no interest in BL!"

"Er…in that case…okay, fujoshi …well, long ago, when Japan still had cultural block, a lot of people could only fantasize about those things. Because we had to hide it, when we get together we tend to voice them out loudly, without holding anything back. That's why in case we can't get along, we will know that we will never get along."

I …think I kind of understand…

Because those fujoshi tend to lose themselves when mentioning about their favorites, they would never get along with someone with different favorites.

That is how Kuroneko tricked Sena into a trap.

Of course, Kuroneko also underestimated Sena the fujoshi.

"In other words, 'ashamed' is a part of fujoshi's cultural too?"

"…Yes"

So, even those fujoshi hesitated when talking about their hobby.

"That's why – recently, all those fujoshi girls in novels and manga are fake. Of course, those authors can do whatever they want to make their story more interesting, but inside a fujoshi is much more complicated. But because of them, most people assume a different view of fujoshi – normally for the worse."

Wait a second. Were you exactly the same? After listening to you, I couldn't help but feel that all fujoshi are perverts.

"So… Are you hoping that people get a better view of your kind?"

"Nope, as long as people leave us alone, that much is enough."

With a tired voice, Sena continued:

"Of course…we can't go around announcing that we are fujoshi… We know that people think our habit is weird …in fact, we fujoshi rarely speak about it to anyone but close friends."

"I see…"

But didn't you speak loudly about that not long ago?

Aware of their strange hobby, aware of the need to keep it a secret – but at the same time couldn't help but fantasize about it, then instantly turned into a pervert.

That's the root of Sena's problem.

….After talking with her, I realized that the atmosphere is quite friendly. I think it's time to move forward. What? You guy asked move what forward?

Raised flag to enter "Sena route", of course.

In eroge term, this was one of the most important flags to trigger a route.

A sudden meeting outside of school – that's a very common setting in eroge. If I play it right, then the steamy part is almost guaranteed.

"…Kou..Kousaka-senpai? Somehow I just felt like something just sent shivers down my spine…"

"You must be overthinking."

No no no. My head was corrupted by those otaku.

I was not a fujoshi, but I need to control myself.

So…what should we talk about now…

"Hey, about…"

"What?"

1. How is your relationship with your brother?

2. Do you have any suggestion about this game contest ?

3. The truth is, from the beginning, your breasts are pressed against me.

"How is your relationship with your brother?"

"Hmm? Very bad."

"Hm? But your brother is a total siscon, isn't he?"

"Yes he is! It's so gross."

Hm… Why did I have a déjà vu feeling?

"Hey hey Akagi. At least don't badmouth your own brother in broad daylight."

"Why did Kousaka-senpai say that…. Ah…right, right …. He must be in love with my brother…"

"Definitely not!"

Please, at least don't speak that out loud, I could pretend like I didn't hear that!

"Don't you remember? When you talked with him with my phone during the welcoming party, you even said 'Thank you, Onii-chan. Do your best, Onii-chan'."

"Aa – please forget that!"

Blushing furiously, Sena tried to deny.

Ahaha…totally unlike my sister, this girl was a flat-out brocon.

Ok, let's choose 2. Next.

"Do you have any suggestion about this game contest? "

"Hmm…..Please don't tell anyone else…The truth is I' m looking forward to it."

"Why? You and Gokou still cannot get along, right?"

Sena's expression suddenly filled with confidence.

"Because it's a wonderful chance. If my game wins, then everyone will know about MY game. And then -."

"Then what?"

"Then Gokou will get some confidence right? She will probably think 'ah, as long as I follow Miss Sena, cooperate with her, everything will be fine… Thank you for helping me realizing it. I love you.', right?"

Saying that, Sena busted out laughing. Her ego was bigger than I thought.

I thought she would have some idea as a team leader, but she was still a pervert at her core.

But, the part about cooperating with Kuroneko was truly necessary.

Kuroneko and Sena should be friends. They both had similar hobbies, both liked anime – and I thought comparing to Kirino, she was more suited to become Kuroneko's friend. Because when Sena's secret was

revealed, they had one less secret with each other. Just a little more help and they should become good friends – I hoped.

If I could use that chance to improve their relationship, that's wonderful.

"Senpai is probably on Gokou-san's side right? But I won't give up."

"You seem very confident."

"Of course!"

Haha. Sena seems very excited.

Even I felt excited with her.

From the first time meeting her, I had felt like we could get along well.

Bonus for the fact that she was a meganekko.

I walked into the bookstore with Sena.

On the way inside, I noticed a new book on sale.

That book was “Maisora 2” [3]. This was the one my sister – Kirino wrote.

…They already published it?

Unknown to me, I let out a tired sigh. My memories returned back to that Christmas in Shibuya, when Kirino asked me to get some real experience.

Yeah…. We entered a love hotel too…

“What’s up senpai? Ah, what? That book got a sequel? ”

“You know it?”

“I hate it so much.”

I almost snapped, the word “how dare you” was already on my tongue.

Right. This girl doesn’t know this is my sister’s book.

I tried my best to hide my anger, and asked her:

“Why?”

"Because the heroine's personality really sucks – the more I read the more I hate it. Although there are many opinions about the evaluation of this book, but I really do not find it interesting."

“I see….”

Maybe because the heroine was based on Kirino herself. I could understand Sena’s opinion.

“But this book is selling pretty well.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Although I don’t know why, but many people find this book interesting.”

Sena picked up one “Maisora 2” and showed it to me.

“True love story of a middle school girl – second part. Well, I don’t know whether it is true, but the rumor said that the author is a middle school girl.”

Well, that was the truth.

“One of the reasons for this book being so well-known is because of that rumor. She didn’t reveal herself, but

she post a bit of this online to attract attention. Frankly speaking, this book can sell so well is only partly thanks to author's ability… Kousaka-senpai?"

"Hm?"

"What's wrong? You seems in a daze.."

"I'm fine."

Just a little upset.

My stupid little sister. Her friend was so worried about her, but she didn't contact us. Not once.

Of course, I knew that no news means good news – everything happened as she planned, but...

Ah ---- This girl… She…..What was she doing right now?

Pipipipipipipipi…..

"Your phone…"

"Ah right! Damn why did it suddenly ring so loud."

I hastily look at my phone in order to know who called me.

The screen show that the caller is ----

“Sorry, I got to go now.”

“That’s fine. Next time then.”

The one calling me wasn’t Kirino but Fate Setsuna.

Iori Fate Setsuna. Office lady. Tall, thin. End of story.

Long ago, Kirino once clashed against her because she tried to steal Maisora.

In the end, everything was nicely wraped up, so we didn’t bring her to court.

After I separated with Sena, I came to the place where Fate told me.

“How did you know my number?”

“Kirino told me.”

Kirino? Why did she tell this woman my number?

And…in some way, this was because of her that Kirino is gone now.

Because of her, Kirino was able to get enough money to study abroad. Well, I knew that this is not the only reason, but whatever, I don't want to meet her.

After we sit down, she said:

"What should I call you? Kyousuke-kun? Or just Kyousuke?"

"Whatever. Fa--"

Wait. I remembered that she hated it when people called her Fate.

But she remained calm and just laughed it off.

"You can call me whatever you want."

"Sorry, Fate-san."

I answered, my voice full of disgust.

"So? What do you want to talk about?"

However, she had changed. It is hard to explain, but her sharp voice was gone, replaced by a much softer tone . Even the way she talked was different.

"About that – let's talk while we are eating. Of course, this is my treat. Hey, Kyousuke, pick whatever you like."

"Why are you speaking so formally now?"

"Ah, sorry. Recently I reverted back to my former tone . Maybe I was affected by you?"

You meant affected by Kuroneko.

After Fate-san meet Kuroneko, who was "totally like her formal self", I think she didn't changed, just returned back to her original self.

Although…. A middle age woman she spoke like a middle school girl….

How the hell could she survive in life until now?

"So…Fate-san, how are you recently?"

"Me? Er…My bank account is almost empty, and I feel so tired…"

"Is it that bad?"

"I don't mean to boast, but my situation is very bad. Living alone, no family. My underling was fired. I put almost everything on a gamble and then lost them all. Now, I need to put my everyday meals on tab…."

And yet you are still laughing?

Fate-san proudly said:

"By the way, my income is 530,000 yen per year."

"So it is completely hopeless."

I didn't think that Fate-san is that desperate.

Picking up the bill, I signaled a nearby waiter.

"Let me pay for this meal! Seriously, how could you still be able to live until now?"

"..Sorry. As if I'm depending on you again."

As if? I think you just begged me. How could I leave you alone after hearing that?

After I paid for our meal – let's get back on topic.

"I'm very sorry."

"I don't care. So? What do you want to talk with me about?"

"You got a fake little sister, don't you?"

"You mean Kuroneko?"

"Yes, this is her."

So she knew that Kuroneko is not my real sister.

"I hope you can thank her in my place."

"Thanks?"

"Yes, thanks. Not only apologize. I already said that to Kirino, but I haven't had a chance to meet this girl."

I remained silent, listening to her.

"When I remember what she said to me – I remembered those simple, bitter feelings, but at the same time feel very nostalgic. Thanks to that, I think I'm able to realize many things."

"Many things?"

"Yes, many things."

Fate-san smiled. Her face brightened, like she just dropped something off her chest. I can't help but smile too.

"I will let you know how to contact her, so you can say that yourself."

"..Um…you are right…"

She closed her eyes, thinking.

To tell the truth, this simple action combined with her mature age almost moved me.

Thank god that she didn't have glasses.

"So?"

"No…Nothing…"

After a short silence, Fate-san changed the subject:

"By the way, your little sister – Kirino had gone studying abroad right?"

"How could you know that?"

"Per Kirino's request, I'm also taking part in editing < Maisora> and < Maisora 2>. Imagine how surprised I was when she suddenly said 'I want to study abroad'."

"Kirino's request?"

What the? This woman almost stole Kirino's work. How could Kirino asked her for editing?

"Even I didn't believe it myself. But Kirino said 'I could finish this book thanks to Iori-san's advice. So that the readers can have the best book to read, I hope you can help me. Beside, I'd rather not spend the opening ceremony alone with Kumagai-san.' – Even I think this girl is too naïve."

"------"

You were wrong. Kirino was not naïve at all.

Especially in her "work".

She definitely would not ask for someone to help because of a personal reason.

So she knew that in order for her work to become better, she needed Fate-san's help. And the result showed that Fate-san had the required skill.

And why Kirino didn't try to bring Fate-san to court, I guess because she wanted a better book.

<Maisora> became a best seller only a part of Kirino's writing skill. Another part was Fate-san's marketing skill.

Even if Fate-san had no writing skill, this truth couldn't be denied.

Even I also hoped that she could continue what she did before.

"With Kumagai-san's recommendation, I agreed to participate in editor department exam."

"I see…."

"Of course I still don't think I'm worthy for that. Beside…considering what I tried to do…I doubt any writer wanted an editor who already tried to steal another writer's work once…I don't really feel fit for this job…"

Fate-san expressed what she thought.

"But…but…I'm almost starved to death…."

She tried to smile again:

"So, I wanted to try another time."

"I see."

"Ah right Kyousuke. What did you need to speak with me about?"

"Ah, right. Actually, I'm a member of Game Research Club ---"

" --- And that's why I hope those two freshmen can cooperate together. Not only it could become a happy memory, this is a chance for them to become friends too."

This should be possible.

A same goal to reach to, this is a good way to deepen one's relationship. Bonus if they got a good prize.

"I wanted to help them get a prize in this contest."

In front of me was someone Kirino acknowledged for her marketing skill.

Of course writing novels and making games were totally unrelated, but I hoped she could give me some advice.

"If this is the case, then I have some advice for you,"

"Really?"

"Ah..Don't set your expectations too high… Because I' m not familiar with gaming. Well… actually my advice is just something very normal."

"No problem! Thank you!"

"Okay…First…what is the theme of this contest?"

"Theme?"

"Yes. That 'Chaos Create' contest probably chooses a winning game from what the participant brings right? Because different contests have different themes. So if you look at previous contests, you can know what theme is easier to win, how about it?"

"I see – Got it. I can do this right after I get home."

"Yes. Um…is that helpful for you?"

"Of course. I will talk with my club member about it tomorrow. We should make ---- "

"An eroge ?!?! "

The next day, I told everyone this brilliant idea.

"What? Wait wait! You are insane Kousaka-senpai! Do you know what you just said?"

Sena immediately objected. I shot her a death glare, then said:

"Wait, let me explain."

"No matter what you say I won't change my mind."

"Just listen. Chaos Create submissions are divided by genres, like RPG or FPS. Depend on your game's genres, the number of submission is different. That's why there are some genres that are very hard to get a prize, but for some other genres is much easier."

"I see. We are going to choose the genres with the best chance of winning."

Good idea right?

"In other words, abnormal game genres equal abnormal chance to win. We can easily win if we choose the right genres."

"So…um…are you…saying that …the genres with the best chance of winning is…"

"That's right! Eroge! R18+ "

Hm. I showed my best charming smile, my finger pointed directly at Sena.

Of course, before that I had locked the door, enter ' Do-or-die' mode.

Sena also immediately stood up, screamed at me:

"How could a high school club make an eroge? Are you an idiot, senpai?"

"Hm? Isn't that a perfectly reasonable suggestion?"

"You…how could you look so confident…Someone smack some sense into him please!"

Sena turned around for help. But she is meet with the president's smile:

"You really are my brethren! How could I miss that!"

"Another idiot? Hey hey, are there only perverts in this club?"

I wanted to say that "no matter how I look, you are the biggest pervert here" but then I realize….

If I said that, this mean I acknowledge that I'm a pervert.

"Ma..Makabe-senpai! Makabe-senpai surely can understand me! He will know what I'm talking about…!"

Sena shook Makabe's shoulder, while his face showed a very trouble expression.

"Ah ah ah…."

"Look! Look you idiot! This is what a normal human should think! Here, Makabe-senpai, help me make them understand!"

"About Kousaka-senpai's suggestion, I think it's true that eroge is an easy genre. Actually, both Gokou-san and Sena-san game needs to add only a few more eroge CG and it could be qualified."

But he stopped for a second.

"But…are we going to let a female junior write an eroge's sex scene?"

"Yes, of course."

I calmly replied.

"Pervert! Pervert! Pervert!"

Blushing madly, Sena shouted at me.

"Keep your voice down please…."

"How could I keep my voice down! You wanted me to do something so embarrassing! This is sexual harassment ! No, power harassment!"

"Sexual harassment? Hm, what a nice example! If I asked you to write an eroge scene between two guys, you must be very happy, aren't you?"

"Of course! I would give it 120% -- wait! What are you making me say?"

So predictable.

"Don't put words in my mouth!"

Sena turned toward Kuroneko.

"Look, even Gokou-san must be disagreeing! Come here. Give this sexual harassment senpai a lesson. Tell him off like you always do, like 'I will curse you to death' ."

…It is harder than I thought – looks like we can't do this at all.

But…

Kuroneko's response was outside of mine and Sena's expectation.

"…If senpai wants, I will do it…"

Hm? What? Really?

I thought she would give me a 'deathly curse' speech.

Her ears redden, she avoided my eyes, and said:

"…I could add that to my game. So this is not a problem at all…"

"Go…Gokou-san…what …are you saying?"

"…More CG…better chances to win…"

Embarrassed, yet Kuroneko still continues talking.

"Yes…I could probably do that…"

"But I have never written about males in this part before …so until I give it a try, I won't know how good I will be."

So Kuroneko only wrote about female parts in any erotic scenes.

Looks like she lacked confidence. So I told her in a sincere voice:

"In that case… I can help you out!"

"…Er? What help?"

Kuroneko suddenly stopped, then hit the table with a loud "bang" and stood up.

"You…you…how dare you say that to me…. How dare you suggest something so shameless…"

"Wait wait wait! You are misunderstanding! I didn't mean it that way."

I meant to read your scene then give you my opinion as a male erogamer. I didn't mean like an eroge protagonist 'Ahahaha I will show you some real life information'!

Shaking in anger, Kuroneko said:

"Rejected! Totally rejected!"

Next to me, Sena ---

"From now on, I will call you sexual harassment senpai."

Her ice-cold gaze pierced my heart.

A week later, during lunch break, I spent time together with Manami reading books. Recently I was so busy that a chance to relax was so rare. That's why I more than welcomed this opportunity.

"Manami, thank you."

"Ah? Ah? What…why are you… suddenly…"

"What? I only wanted to say thanks."

"Nothing..nothing…but…"

Manami smiled shyly.

"Kyou-chan…You are always so gentle, but recently you are even more gentle than usual."

"What are you saying?"

That was all thanks to the people around me. Of course, this was also thanks to my old lazy self starting to go away.

Even if I didn't want to admit it – but it was thanks to the girl who is not here. Although considering how much she hated Manami, this result would probably upset her.

"Ah, Kyou-chan."

"Hmm?"

"Some first year girls have been looking at us for a while…"

No wonder I felt so many gazes. But when I looked back at them, they quickly hide.

"Hm, to think that I'm that handsome…"

"I don't think so, Kyou-chan."

"Hey!"

I'm hurt, you know?

Blinking, Manami turned to me with an expression 'I can't believe it':

"Because they looked at Kyou-chan and said 'so that is sexual harassment senpai'."

"Ah..ahahah…I wonder what they are talking about?"

Damn you Sena! How dare you spread that rumor about me!

Well...we were even now, so I couldn't blame her. But … this…

Ah… Looks like no junior would confess to me in the future.

I enjoyed the moment, and let my eyes wander around .

That's how I saw Kuroneko. She was sitting alone on a bench behind school, eating her lunch.

My chest hurt just from looking at this scene. She purposely avoided her classmates, choosing a faraway spot to hide her loneliness.

"What's wrong, Kyou-chan?"

"Nothing…"

I didn't want Manami to see Kuroneko like that, but unfortunately her eyes followed mine, and she let out an embarrassing "ah…".

Didn't know what to say, she hesitated for a while, then said:

"..This…what a lovely bentou."

That's for sure. And this was a "Meruru bentou."

Aside from Kirino's favorite anime "Stardust witch Meruru" bentou box, there were also Meruru-style food. However, from the look of it, I doubted this bentou has enough nutrition.

She ate only that much?

"…But why? Why Meruru bentou?"

She clearly hated that anime. She even had some fierce argument with Kirino because of that.

So why?

Suddenly, I realized that my eyes were still locked onto Kuroneko's position.

Wait wait. She didn't want to be seen too.

Shaking my head, I forced my eyes into another direction.

That's when I noticed Manami laid on the table nearby with her arms straight.

Manami usually sits in a very polite manner, so this was something I rarely saw.

"…Why are you so depressed?"

"…Uh? Me? No, I'm not."

"Liar."

I tried to force the answer out of her.

"…Oh…"

Behind her glasses, Manami's eyes turned moist. Maybe she knew that she couldn't avoid it, she whispered:

"Sorry for making you worry. But …I…hate myself."

"What? Why?"

"Sorry, this is my secret…"

I was surprised. I didn't think that Manami could have a secret.

However, I made a joke:

"Hmm? You are depressed because it's a secret that you can't share with me?"

"…Because that's Kyou-chan, so I can't share it."

"Huh?"

"Nothing…."

Manami laid down again. Looks like she really is depressed. Well, I can't just let it go anymore.

Rubbing the back of my head, I said:

"Okay, listen. You don't need to tell me why you are depressed. Just tell me how I can help you. As long as this is something I could do, I will do it. By the way, don' t tell me 'nothing', because I won't be able to stand it. So just tell me a request or something, okay?"

That's what my heart thought. Although due to my embarrassment, my voice was a bit forceful.

But strangely, Manami smiled.

"..Thank you. You mean I can ask you anything?"

"Of course. Real men never go back on their words. Just say it."

"…Ha..hi hi…"

Manami blushed, shyly asked me:

"I hope Kyou-chan can tell me what kind of girl you like."

"Wh..what?"

What did she just say? If this was a normal situation, I could just give her a random answer…but now…I doubted it will work.

"Just…tell me what kind of girl you like."

Oh damn. Real men did not go back on their words. Fine.

"I like a girl who looks like Ayase."

"A..Ayase? No, no, no it can't be! It is impossible! Not Ayase."

"Why did you reject it so strongly! I'm fully aware that we are in completely different league! And she hates my guts too! But the truth - like you asked - is I like girls who look like Ayase!"

So, please tell me Manami. Why did you react so strongly?

With almost teary eyes, Manami shook her head:

"No, no! I, I, I…I didn't mean it that way..! Ah…so… Kyou-chan likes girls who look like Ayase, right?"

"Yes, yes. And I mean her appearance only! I didn't mean her personality! Not at all!"

No matter how cute/beautiful she was, I wouldn't enter a relationship with a girl who undoubtedly will call the police at my smallest approach.

"Appearance only? So… what about personality?"

"Of course that would be your personality!"

I honestly answered immediately. But Manami's eyes widen in shock:

"M..Me?"

"Yes. No matter what, amongst girls I know, you are the one I get along with best. We have known each other for a long time, we are already very familiar with each other, I do not need to be too polite with you. When I'm with you, I feel very relaxed. That means I like your personality, do I?"

Why must I say something so embarrassing?

"Ah…my personality…ah..and appearance…"

"…Time's almost up. Let's go."

I wouldn't say something like that again.

"Hey! I will participate in this contest too, so tell those first years to prepare themselves!"

After school – club room. Our president announced that.

"What is it now…"

"President wants to join too?"

"Yes. I want to have some fun too!"

That was a good idea. With a nearby competitor, those two would probably get even more motivated.

Makabe asked:

"You can't possible make the same genres, so …what game are you going to make?"

"Wrath of Justice. This is the game I made earlier for recruiting."

"You mean another Kuso game."

"How..how could you know that?"

"The first level was a Kuso game, so it is normal for the rest of the game to be a Kuso game too."

"Don't be so short-sighted. Maybe we can make something like Dragonquest 2."

"I'm afraid it would be another Area 52 [4]."

"You are doing nothing but discouraging me! Guys! Help me teach him a lesson!"

Of course, no one moved as he ordered.

"You guys…! Don't look down on me! I can make other games too!"

I didn't think this is possible. Makabe pointed out the obvious flaw:

"President, please tell me what is your definition of ' great game'?"

"Like this?"

"This is a Kuso game!"

"You! You!...What…!"

Directly to the point! Nice work Makabe!

"In short, you can join, but please don't get in the way of our juniors."

"You guy don't trust me that much – fine! Okay, let's start our briefing!"

Right after that, Sena stood up:

"Me first! Everyone, please look at the screen!"

She presented her idea, with additional pictures and notes. Her story was well-prepared and looked impressive.

The fat duo whistled and clapped, completely turning into Sena's fans. But Sena's face still showed a troubled expression.

So Sena got at least two votes. Looks like it was not gonna be easy for Kuroneko.

Then came her preview picture -

A normal male character in traditional medieval clothing in RPG. President asked:

"Is that an in game picture?"

"Yes. I thought adding some would be better to explain my idea."

That picture was quite good, too.

Looks like she was multi-talented like Kuroneko. No wonder she wanted to enter gaming industry.

" – In other words, I intended to make a dungeon exploration RPG!"

"You mean…like 'Witchcraft' or 'World Tree Labyrinth'?"

"Yes! I think the reason for Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy to be so successful is because their ancestor Witchcraft got so many amazing RPG's traits."

Pointing her finger above, she continued:

"Since the moment you created a character, you can freely choose to adventure or treasure hunting – this could become an important part of any MMO. In fact, I think due to integrating these parts, Monster Hunter sells so well."

"…Your opinion about RPG is unrelated to me. Tell me, how are you going to achieve the fun as in the original RPG?"

With mocking voice, Kuroneko interrupted.

But Sena still remained confident, her chest inflated.

Wow. Her breasts are huge.

"Good question. I will now present the concept of the game."

"I plan to make a game not complex or major, just primitive – with focus on balancing. Right now, many RPG have amazing shops, huge worlds, lots and lots of classes. Of course we couldn't do the same thing. But as long as we focus on the RPG part, we can still win. Enemy encounter rate, enemy respawn rate, enemy action, reward experience points, magic, inn prices, equipment,… --- as long as we can balance those things, we could make thrilling battle scenes, we could make the player feel excitement – the feeling of 'I'm having an adventure'. I plan to let the player experience that feeling with my game!"

"Part of your idea seems to come from World Tree Labyrinths. That game proved a weak and small game console can still have good RPG."

"Yes that's it! I knew that it's probably not enough, so I plan to add some more illustrations to lead the story. This is much better than giving the player a wall of text."

I was not really getting it, but she clearly gave it a lot of preparation.

Makabe asked:

"I'm aware that balancing an RPG is quite hard. Do you think you could do it in the allotted time?"

"Don't worry Makabe-senpai. For a dungeon exploration RPG, one town is enough. We don't need any flashy illustrations for weapon and equipment, just normal ones. Do you remember in Witchcraft, we don't even have that? My game will not be based on those illustrations, just a few is enough. Worst case, I could remove all illustrations and focus on a text-based RPG. In that case, I could even increase game speed, allowing the player to enjoy the game without any pressure. Isn't that great, senpai?"

"You are right. But balancing is not as easy as it sounds."

President expressed his doubt. But Sena showed a proud smile:

"Hm Hm. I don't want to boast, but this is my specialty. I'm very confident in this field."

"Indeed, you seems very confident."

"If you still doubt me, then take my demo and try for yourselves. Although there are no illustrations and the game stops at the fifth floor, I can guarantee that there will be no bugs. And since I did that all alone, I think Makabe-senpai can rest easy now."

"Okay… I think I get it…"

He turned to us:

"Sound good to me. What do you guys think?"

Makabe was the first to give his opinion:

"I think it's interesting. I remember when I was in elementary school, I used a notebook and pencil to play RPG too. So I agree with Akagi-san's idea."

"Self-made RPG isn't it? I played that too."

…Even I played that kind of game too.

One guy drew the game on his notebook, and we used dices and pencil to play with each other…

If you asked me about my RPG's experience, this was probably it.

"Ha ha, so just choose my game already."

Sena boasted.

As expected, many members gave her their support.

"Next is Gokou-san's idea."

Kuroneko probably heard that, but she remained motionless.

"Hey, it's your turn."

"…I..I know."

She looked panicked. Her movement was rigid.

"…So…I…I …I will now present my idea. Please move out of the projector's way."

"Okay okay."

Pushing Sena aside, Kuroneko took a huge pile of paper from her bag and distributed it to everyone.

"..What is that?"

"…Related information, like setting reference, of course."

…I should have expected that…

Even in making a game, she still kept her habit.

Compare to Sena's, her reference should be about five times bigger.

After confirming that everyone had those papers, Kuroneko said in a small voice:

"…I planned to make a visual game."

"Hm – this is unexpected. A traditional game genres."

First was the president's comment. Next to him, Makabe added:

"How long do you plan to make it?"

"…About three routes, each lasting about five hours."

"Three routes? Even counting the same parts, this is still a huge workload…"

"Too long. How about making it a bit shorter?"

"I think so too. We're making a game for fun anyway, so one route is enough."

Some objections immediately appeared.

After each objection, Kuroneko responded with "Ah, that's because…" but gradually she became silent. Her eyes darted back and forth between the questioner and her papers, but she didn't say anything. She had been completely discouraged, simply unable to properly express her own ideas.

This should not continue.

Sigh… At this important time, why couldn't you speak nonstop like when you had a quarrel with Kirino?

"Wait just a moment."

I couldn't stand it anymore.

"About the time limit, I don't think it will be a problem ."

After a moment, Kuroneko answered:

"Yes… I could handle most of the work in time."

"Even in that case, there is a limit how much you alone can do."

Our president was very experienced with making games, so his words were very convincing.

But unlike him, I knew Kuroneko better than that. She could draw manga and write a novel at the same time, so this much is not a problem.

So I turned to her:

"Tell them. How hard you can work?"

"…Six kilobytes of text per hour."

I didn't even know if this is good or not.

"…In that case, there should be no problem with the story."

From Makabe's words, that much was impressive. I continued:

"In my survey, because novel game is very famous, they usually get divided into smaller themes. That's why in 'Chaos Create', visual novel is also counted as an 'easy to get prize' genres. So Gokou-san's choice suits our original object, isn't it?"

"…You talked too much. Are you supporting me?"

"Nope. These are my personal opinions."

I glared at other members, and put a hand on Kuroneko's shoulder.

"Besides, she is very experienced at drawing manga and writing scripts. Plus she writes very fast and draws quite well too."

"…Why are you boasting.."

Because you obviously didn't know what to say, so I had to boast in your place.

"I assured you it's not a lie."

"I'm not that good…"

Don't be so modest. Now was the time to show off your confidence. Like usual, when we were alone.

Listening to our conversation, the president asked:

"If I remember correctly, you can also write light novels, right?"

"Yes.."

"Ha ha ha. Good. Good. With enough time, you probably can do everything by yourself!"

Bowed, Kuroneko whispered:

"That's because I originally learned to make a game all by myself…. Besides, please don't think of me too highly. Although I can do everything, I have no confidence in work proficiency."

"I told you before. Games are made by a group, not by a single person."

The president smiled.

I smiled with Kuroneko too.

"Looks like it is possible to make this game in time too ---"

Sena interrupted:

"But could it really be an interesting game? I don't think it is possible. I haven't read all of your paper here, but I think between your game and mine, they are as different as chalk and cheese."

"…Then what about your male-only games?"

Yeah, they are clearly different.

"Shut up! We are not talking about my illustration at the moment! I want to say that a dark and complex story like your writing is too much for normal players! Beside, half of the words have a hidden or second meaning. I think it's better if you could change it into something brighter and easier to understand."

"I think so too."

Totally unexpected – Kuroneko agreed.

"Then…"

"But this is what I want to do."

Kuroneko smiled. A rather dark, evil smile, if you asked me.

Suddenly my back was covered in cold sweat. I remember this feeling – it was…

"Long ago, I let one of my friends see my novel…."

It was….

"She said 'your writing is just a bunch of self-gratifying masturbation work'."

"Isn't the situation the same as now? You are worried if the player will be able to enjoy the game or not, right?"

"At that time, the same friend also told me 'The most important thing for an author is working on something they enjoy. Without it, then you can't make anything remotely interesting. This is how an author's proper attitude should be!'"

"Your…friend's words make me very uncomfortable …but it sounds accurate."

She was speaking the truth. Indeed someone told my sister that.

"But she is not wrong. Not one bit."

"I agree. It's so correct that I could vomit. That only works for people who are lucky enough that what they enjoy writing equals what sells. But what about everyone else?"

"Well…I don't think I have an answer…"

True. But now, I doubted Kuroneko was speaking with Sena too.

"I hate that kind of author who can freely write anything they want like that, from the bottom of my heart. I want to kill them in the most horrible way possible.

"…That's just your jealousy."

"So what?"

"What?"

"Hm, maybe I don't really want them to kill themselves. I admit that maybe my jealousy got in the way a bit. But remember, we have our own pride. Don't you want to show them a thing or two?"

As if remembering something funny, Kuroneko let out an evil smile.

"I once thought…how to make those writers open their eyes, how to make them kneel before me and say 'I' m sorry for looking down on you'."

This was my first time seeing someone with such a twisted personality.

But strangely, after listening to Kuroneko, I smiled:

"So your conclusion is?"

"Ignore them and defy their idea of what things ' should' be like."

"At any cost?"

"Yes. Because we have no problem writing what we wanted. Self-gratification? Masturbation work? So what?

Let those annoying people object as much as they want. I'm going to do whatever I want, in any way I see fit. If they call my masturbation work boring, then I'll show them masturbation like they have never seen before!"

"You just said something very disgusting..."

"….."

Due to her excitement, Kuroneko now realized that she just talked a lot about her idea. Although she was blushing, but she tried to remain calm and finish:

" --- This is what I wanted to do. I knew that this is my personal opinion, so please give me your honest answer. "

The club room was filled with silence.

"Good! Both of you had prepared very well! Good job! "

"Are we going to hold a vote now, President?"

Faced with Makabe's question, the president answered :

"No, we will vote after 30 minutes. Let's take that time and check their demos and documents before we make a decision."

"All right! Then we will vote in 30 minutes."

Although next was to review the related documents, but the situation didn't look good for Kuroneko.

Because her documents were not only big, it was also hard to read.

While Sena even brought a demo, her preparation was more carefully planned.

…Seems like our chance was not very good….

30 minutes later ---

Now is the time to choose Kuroneko or Sena's idea.

The president took a look around, then said:

"Now – first, who votes for Akagi, please raise their hand."

No one moved, including the fat duo – 0 votes.

"What…."

Even Sena was rendered speechless. Although she stood up immediately, she was not able to say anything.

"Next, who votes for Gokou-san?"

This time, everyone raised their hand. Me, the president, Makabe, and the fat duo.

"Okay. So the first years will be making Gokou-san's game."

Bang!

"Wait just a second! What is the meaning of this!"

Recovering from her shock, Sena violently hit the desk. The president looked at her then answered:

"What do you mean? Just as you have seen…."

"That's abnormal! How could it be? I'm aware that Gokou-san's idea is good. But… zero votes? You mean… my game is really that inferior to Gokou-san's?"

Kuroneko just silently closed her eyes, ignoring Sena's pleading eyes.

Next – every club member (me included) turned to the president.

Noticing our gaze, the president looked like he wanted to say "Hey! You want me to say it?" and pointed at himself. Everyone responded with a "Please" nod.

The president let out a pitiful cry, then talked to Sena in a sincere voice.

"About that… Akagi-san, your game is good."

"Please don't say such kind words ---"

"It's not just kind words. I really wanted to see your game. I plan to continue that idea even if your game is rejected now. To be honest, I think if we voted 30 minutes earlier, you would have won."

That much I agree.

Of course, Kuroneko was full of hope and enthusiasm, but as she said, there are a lot of personal arbitrariness

parts. In contrast, Sena's game even made someone like me feel much hope in it. It's almost perfect.

But why would everyone vote for Kuroneko in the end ?

"You means in that 30 minutes, everyone changed their minds? Is something wrong in my demo? How could it be? I had checked it many times before, there is absolutely no bugs – not a single one."

"I see. You still don't understand. Then we have no choice but to show it."

The president turned his laptop on. It was showing a scene from Sena's demo game. As Sena said, this is one of the 'few scenes with CG'.

The president turned the screen to Sena, and slowly asked:

"For example… Sena… what scene is this?"

"Huh? Party event at the healing spring, of course."

She replied with a tone 'everyone will understand at the first look, right?'.

Of course, all party members are male.

"Isn't the composition of the warrior getting an arm inserted into his anus totally awesome? Also, I think the Samurai X Necromancer pairing is so moe! Now people don't like big, muscle X weak, small pairing anymore! Here, take a look! The hilt of the Masamune Blade has ' Anal Fuck' written on it! We need to have Gokou-san draw the scene for this one!"

"Pervert! Pervert! Pervert!"

Just like Sena did, I returned the favor, still blushing.

"You you… And you called me sexual harassment senpai! Modern light illustration? Are you talking in your dream? Look how heavy they are! You are not making a RPG, but a homo game!"

"What are you talking about Kousaka-senpai? I planned to make a hardcore homo RPG game."

"How is that different?"

"Completely different! By the way, I used you guys as my character models!"

"I noticed that! Here, this guy with a tattoo on his ass is me, isn't it?"

"Hi hi hi"

Don't show me your proud smile!

Phew…phew… I haven't said so much for a long time.

"From now on, I will call you sexual harassment kouhai."

This was the first time a girl gave me such a nauseous feeling.

Normally she suppressed her hobby, but she loses control when she lets it out. Was she planning to use this game in a contest?

"You…you can't force your senpai to do something so embarrassing! No matter what, we won't make such a game!

"You..you mean my art – my game made you uncomfortable?"

Yes I said that. You made me feel a headache.

Now I understood Ayase's feelings. Can't be helped now. Just imagining about those males based on me doing… that made me want to vomit.

Beside, everyone turned into a muscle guy. Only the president has his glasses left.

He concluded:

"You see, everyone doesn't like it. Sorry, but give it up."

"…Ah..But…ah…"

Sena started crying. Well, this is her game after all. I think she must have been unconvinced.

"About that…so…you want me to cooperate with someone as arbitrary as Gokou-san?"

I felt sorry for Sena, so I didn't say anything.

But the president continued:

"That's right. You two cooperate and make Gokou's game. That's an order."

"……"

We could hear the sound of grinding teeth.

With a serious expression, the president said:

"…If you don't like it, you don't have to come anymore! So, will you do it or not?"

"Ah…oh…ah…I…"

"I?"

"I'm going to tell my Onii-chan!!!!"

When my ears recovered, Sena was already gone.

This girl… she puts up a calm appearance, but inside she was still a kid!

Makabe stood up, trying to follow Sena. But the president stopped him.

"Making a game is a group work. She is well aware that 'this is unreasonable' yet was still unable to accept it. Until she can accept that, talking to her is useless."

Sena had her own idea of making a game. And she couldn't accept that she lost to Kuroneko. That's why she won't back down no matter what.

"…President, will it be okay?"

"I have high hopes for her. She will come back for sure , but I can't say if she can overcome this…"

After a moment of silence, Kuroneko spoke:

"…Since she ran away, I will have to do everything. As long as I can complete my game and get a prize, this should be enough to shut her up, right?"

What are you saying – president said you two should cooperate with each other – if you did everything, then that's meaningless.

But I held my tongue, because…

"….."

Kuroneko also looked very unpleasant.

The next day, Sena didn't come to the club room.

Although Makabe talked with her, all he got is ‘I won’t come back’.

I didn’t think that she wouldn’t come back only because of Kuroneko.

Although sometime we forget, but… this ‘fujoshi’ girl is very shy about her hobby.

After she openly talked about it before everyone, well …. I guess she was so embarrassed that she didn’t want to show up. It was not like she could pretend like nothing happened, either.

I also talked with her brother, Akagi Kouhei. But according to him, his sister was not in a good mood and didn’t want to talk with him.

In other words, we had no way to solve this situation.

Although I wanted Kuroneko to get another friend, but now there was nothing I could do. Not like I could tell her to stop her work out of nowhere.

A few days later. I came back home together with Kuroneko.

"Excuse me…"

Still in her uniform, Kuroneko took off her shoes and then carefully placed them at the door. Unlike normal, today her actions were very slow.

Next, she stood in front of the stairs and looked around, as if checking if anyone's home.

"Nobody home?"

"…Nope. We are the only ones at home now."

Her eyes widen in shock, she stopped in front of the stairs, completely motionless.

Strange. What now?

"…Are you, by any chance …nervous?"

"Of course not."

You clearly were nervous. Strange, she had come to my home many times before, so why is she nervous now ?

Ah..right, I forgot…the situation now was unlike before.

She didn't come here as Kirino's friend. She came here as my friend now – and besides, this was the first time we are alone.

I should have considered that. She is a girl, after all. I've got to do something about it.

"……."

Damn. Now it's my turn to be nervous.

"Let's go in."

"Right…"

Finally, Kuroneko stepped inside. But that was such a small step that it was almost like a cat's.

"..Let's begin."

After we came into my room, Kuroneko didn't wait for me to get water or anything, just saying that.

By the way, Kuroneko came here to make the game.

I need to say that beforehand, although our club didn't have a meeting today and Manami was busy, but that's not why I called her to my room.

"Uhm. So, what do you need me to do?"

"Debug."

"Debug?"

"Yes. I want you to use that PC and play my game. Actually, I'm only halfway done – so just keep playing those completed parts and help me find any bugs."

"Okay… I can do that."

"This is a simple, but very time consuming work. Too bad this is something I can't do alone."

"Don't worry, leave it to me."

"…Um… Then.."

Kuroneko lowered her head, and shyly asked:

"Tell me what do you think."

I immediately started the game, then began playing.

During that time, Kuroneko placed her laptop on my bed – pillow position, to be exact – then lied down and worked. She always did that in my room (she said it increases her concentration). Since normally we had Saori with us, this was the first time she did that with me alone.

This girl was too careless. I was glad that she trusted me so much, but honestly this position made me unable to concentrate.

"U.."

"Huh?"

Suddenly she asked me, so I replied in panic.

"…Are you free? Can you come here for a second?"

"Is something wrong?"

I stood up, and went over to my bed.

A pair of careless, pure white thighs was directly right in front of my eyes.

Still laying down, Kuroneko turned to me then asked:

"About this scene… I just added some action. Take a look."

"No problem. Give me your laptop."

"No, it will break my concentration. Move here."

Still laying down, Kuroneko just moved a little bit inside.

"…You want me to lie down next to you?"

"No problem. This is your bed, after all."

"No problem? Are you serious?"

Me. My room. Lying down next to a girl. How could this not cause a misunderstanding? Of course I couldn't do that.

Proof? Kuroneko still looked at me with puzzled eyes.

"What are you hesitating for?"

"Ah..well…"

Just a while ago, you were so nervous. And yet you are so careless now.

I couldn't possibly understand you.

Maybe she was annoyed by my attitude, Kuroneko said in an unhappy voice:

"You could play eroge with your own little sister, and yet you couldn't play a normal visual game with me. What is the meaning of this?"

"How do you know about that?"

"During my last conversation with your sister, she told me."

I see.

That's what she did? The last call she had with Kuroneko?

This girl… Why did she have to add something like that in a conversation with her friend?

Damn, there should be a lot for you to say, right?

We suddenly stopped midway when mentioning Kirino. Maybe my face looked depressed, because Kuroneko suddenly showed a rare smile:

"Let's play a game together, 'Onii-chan'."

"Wrong. There is no way my little sister would say that!"

I let out a tired sigh before sitting down, looked at the screen. Although Kuroneko was right next to me, but I didn't feel anything toward this little girl. Maybe because she is too much like Kirino.

She didn't even treat me as a male student. How could I have any evil intentions towards her?

"Well…I have no problem with that, but please avoid doing things that guys might take the wrong way!"

Hm…how about I mock her a little?

"Or maybe…you like me?"

"I like you."

"What?"

Shocked, I turned to her.

Still blankly staring at the screen, she continued:

"I like you…as much as your little sister likes you."

"Thank god…."

That means not much at all. You almost gave me a heart attack.

"So? What do you think?"

"…The story.. it's too dark… It's making me depressed ."

"This is based on 'The most beautiful mummy' and ' New overlord of the Netherworld'. The story is about 'a boy who loves corpses'. Every night, this boy enter the Death Kingdom and looks for the soul of the girl he loves inside the dungeon."

"There is so much symbolism, I couldn't understand them all."

"Really? Then let me rewrite it into something easier to understand."

"Wait, don't agree to that too easily. I mean, I'm just an amateur, so my opinion – well, maybe is not correct, you understand?"

"No problem. That's why I asked you."

"By the way, how about you change the bad ending? I think most players will break into tears at this point."

"That's the part I want to show no matter what, so I won't change it."

"I see."

"Yes. By the way, players can avoid this ending."

"There are three routes right? There is a good ending among them, isn't it?"

"No."

"No?"

How could you say that so casually?

So – we went back to our work.

Time passed. We were in the same room, but no one said anything. It's neither unpleasant nor boring, but it cannot be said to be stable.

After a few hours, I started to get a hang of this.

The truth was, well, basically all I had to do was keep playing the same scene again and again. If the game stopped or some strange text appeared then I reported it to Kuroneko.

…I felt like making games is just daily work, not too hard but very boring.

In fact, I wondered if I'm really helpful here?

I felt like Kuroneko just let me be here because she is too shy to deny my request.

Suddenly she asked me:

"…Listen to me, senpai?"

"Hmm?"

"Between 'senpai' and 'Onii-chan', what do you prefer me to call you?"

"Why are you asking?"

"Just answer me."

"Hm…let's see…"

1. Senpai

2. Onii-chan

What to choose now?

"Just 'senpai' is fine. We are not family, so it's kind of awkward when I heard you call me 'Onii-chan'."

"I see…."

Kuroneko let out an evil laughter. Her mouth slowly changed into a crescent shape.

This is her smile when she is happy. I'm not sure what that means, but looks like she was satisfied with my answer.

"I see… From now on, when we are alone together, I will call you 'Onii-chan'."

"Why? It's the exact opposite of my earlier choice."

"Because it's more interesting this way."

"You are so hard to deal with!"

So that was your intention from the beginning….

I sighed. Kuroneko was laughing at me, her feet slightly touching each other. Then she raised her leg (still in black stockings) to me, and said in a sweet tone:

"Onii-chan. I'm so tired. Can you massage my leg for me please?"

"Don't be stupid! What's wrong with you? What do you think a normal brother–sister relationship is like?"

"Ara ara? I thought in this house, the brother is his little sister's slave?"

"Definitely not!"

Or so I hoped.

Covering her mouth, Kuroneko broke into laughter.

This is the second time I saw her that happy – no, this is the first time.

In that case... ah forget it. It's better if she smiled more.

I continued testing the game together with Kuroneko.

The next day we repeated this course. I sat at my table while Kuroneko laid on my bed.

"Hey, Kuroneko."

"What's that, Onii-chan?"

"….Don't you think you're coming to my home a little too much? Like today, we could just use our club room instead."

"..Is that bothering you?"

"No, that's not what I meant."

"I see. Then it's no problem."

Well that's true…. But recently I heard the rumor about "senpai brings a junior into his room". Beside, my mom still thinks that I'm going out with Manami, so she gave me a cold shoulder. Like 'die, you two timer'.

"By the way, have you seen Saori recently?"

"Who knows? Maybe she is busy."

You and her are friends, so why didn't you show even the smallest amount of concern?

To be honest, I kind of miss Saori. Maybe I should give her a call.

People said – you don't know how important something is until you lost it.

Looks like I was more afraid of loneliness than I thought.

"By the way, recently did you have any contact with Tamura-senpai?"

"..For some reason, she's always busy…"

Of course, we still went to school together, so I don't mind that too much. But still I felt like something is off.

So, that's why recently I'm almost always with Kuroneko.

"By the way, your game is almost done right?"

"Yes. Both story setting and CG are completed, soundtrack is already from a free source. All I need to do is merge them together. With luck, I can do it in a few more days. We still have more than a week, so there should be no problem."

"That's good to hear."

Although her relationship with Sena was completely a failure, this was still something worth celebrating.

But – things rarely go as planned.

In the final checkup, the game still couldn't run properly. Sometimes the screen froze, sometimes the game stopped. Or when you went into different routes, made different choices, some strange symbol appeared out of nowhere.

“Strange….”

Even Kuroneko began to panic, she desperately typed furiously.

“…Sorry...Maybe I messed up somewhere at the checkup.”

“No, this is not your fault. Besides, I didn’t even give you instruction on how to test the game. I didn’t have any expectations from you since the beginning.”

I knew it. But you don’t have to say it out loud.

She added:

“It’s a bug because of my fault. Don’t blame yourself.”

Lunch break, club room. The next day.

"…It doesn't look good."

We couldn't fix it by ourselves, so we had no choice but to ask Makabe. But after he took a look, that's his answer.

"You couldn't fix it?"

"We could. But… in order to check where the part that cause the bug is will cost us a lot of time."

"How long?"

"About… even if president helps out, we have no chance of finishing it in a week. We won't be able to finish the game in time for the contest."

"……."

Damn. What now?

"…I heard that Gokou-san is very knowledgeable in making games, but is this her first time actually making one?"

"Yes."

Since Kuroneko wasn't here, I answered in her place.

"Unbelievable. She is so good on her first time!"

"I agree. I thought forcing that much work on only her alone is too much, but to be able to make this much. Unbelievable."

Even the president praised her (of course, I was ignored).

They were right. She tried so hard.

If there was nothing else we could do, then we can only give up. No matter how hard you tried, a human has their limit.

That's how I had lived in the last 17 years.

"Listen to me, Kuroneko…"

I softly spoke to my very depressed junior. But Kuroneko whispered:

"My game still has a lot of complex bugs, so we won't be able to fix it in time for the contest. That's what you are trying to say, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's about it."

The president nodded.

Kuroneko lowered her head, thought for a second – then …

She turned around, and ran away.

"Hey wait. Where are you going ---"

In that moment, I saw she bit her lower lip. Her eyes burned with determination.

I followed Kuroneko. I don't know if Kuroneko could hear me, she just kept running.

Soon, we arrived at the first year classroom – this is Kuroneko's classroom.

..What are you intending to do, Kuroneko? What's in your mind?

Because a third year like me suddenly appeared, the commotion broke out in the hallway, with me as their focus. But now there was no way I could just push them away with my glare again.

The classroom's door was pushed open, then Kuroneko stepped inside.

Many students noticed her. A lonely isolated student suddenly came back to her classroom. What could she intend to do?

Without any hesitation, Kuroneko stepped forward. In front of her was Sena.

Brocon, hidden fujoshi. Akagi Sena.

What was she thinking now?

I'm not her, but I can guess. Because no one could be both lazy and unpredictable like me.

She is probably angry at herself. She lost the vote, and then instead of accepting it, she just ran away, abandoning the club's rules.

That's why she couldn't forgive herself.

Noticing Kuroneko, Sena paled.

"..Is something wrong, Gokou-san?"

"Akagi-san, please help me."

Still preparing her defense, Sena was totally caught off guard by Kuroneko's request.

"…What do you mean?"

"My game has got many critical bugs. I cannot fix it in time for the contest."

"..So?"

"You would be able to fix them, right?"

"Why do you think I could?"

"Because of your demo game. It had fast gameplay, but there were no bugs. I couldn't do that. No one in the club can. So as long as I have your help, I could finish my game."

"That's why you are here? You are asking for my help?"

"Yes."

Kuroneko went straight to her point – while Sena didn ’t say anything, her expression unreadable. There was nothing I could say now.

The commotion was getting bigger and bigger. Maybe because everyone thought Kuroneko is a silent type, so this was their first time seeing her talk so much.

But then all of those whispers stopped.

Because Kuroneko bowed toward Sena.

“Please. Let’s make a game together.”

Kuroneko, the shy girl with high self-esteem ---

Everyone was speechless. Even me.

Kuroneko… her hands, her legs... her whole body was shaking.

This was probably the first time she had to do that in front of someone.

Even so, she still lowered her head, and sincerely asked Sena for help.

Sena was the first to recover, she took Kuroneko's hand.

"…Come with me for a second."

Sena pulled Kuroneko and ran out of the classroom. They probably wanted to go somewhere no one was watching.

Naturally, I followed them.

"Really….think about me will you! I can't believe you did that…"

Sena lead Kuroneko to the back of the school.

"..Why must you do that? And in public to boot – "

Sena forced Kuroneko against a wall, then used her breasts to prevent Kuroneko from getting out.

"Besides, how does that relate to me? I don't intend to come back to that club anymore."

Kuroneko immediately raised her hand and pushed Sena away from her.

She brought her face closer, then said:

"…No matter what, I want to finish that game. And I want it to get a prize!"

"Of course I knew that! What I want to ask it why must you go that far? Are you under a curse that will kill you if you don't win or anything? That's probably it, isn't it?"

Against Sena's mocking voice, Kuroneko just replied:

"Yes."

"Once I started to do something, I will see it through until the end. Set a high goal, then follow it with everything I got. I have decided to follow a certain someone's example. If I couldn't do that, then I'll always be a loser – I can only be a second place, doomed for eternity. My pride does not allow me to accept that."

"…What… are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about a friend that I hate, who has gone far away."

I think everyone knows who she was talking about.

In some way, both this girl and I were the same.

We both were affected by the same person, then gradually changed ourselves.

“Is that… is that the same friend you mentioned during your presentation, who you said you wanted to open her eyes?”

“Yes… I wanted her to lick my boot. In order to get that, I will accept any humiliation. I will struggle until my bones break. I won’t give up no matter what.”

Saying that, Kuroneko smiled. She licked her lips, like a cat cornering prey.

“Seriously… Driving me this far… She will get divine retribution. I won’t just let her get away with it. The next time we meet, I will make her cry out loud.”

You took this contest as a stepping stone, so when Kirino came back, you could proudly face her.

“That’s why --- “

Kuroneko looked directly into Sena. Her eyes blazing.

"Please help me, Akagi Sena. If this isn't enough, then I will kneel down and beg. Anything you want!"

"Gokou-san, you…"

With a trouble expression, Sena said:

"Why didn't you tell me any of this before? I know it sounds strange coming from me, but I'm a horrible person, aren't I? I lost, but then I ran away. And now you are forced to bow before me…"

"We have more important things than figuring out who is at fault or who should apologize first. What's more important right now is that I want to make a game together with you."

I could feel that these were her honest feeling. If she doesn't want to lose to this girl, then giving up is not an option. That's why she asked Sena. Not because of she wanted to take advantages of Sena's skill, but because that's her only choice. I thought Sena realized that too.

"To have a friend you can rely on is a wonderful thing. There are always things that you can't do alone, but two – or three can. Alone, you may be too afraid to even take the first step forward, but with your friend, both of you

can. There are times when you try your hardest and still can't get any result, when it's so tough that you want to cry, but if you have someone there to give you support, you can keep going through it. Even the smallest word of encouragement can save you. Yes… That's right.."

I felt like Kuroneko has recalled some of her happy memories.

"If I have a friend to rely on, I will be able to go on. That's what I recently realized. So please, make a game together with me, alright?"

Kuroneko stopped, and blushed in embarrassment.

If it were a year ago, she would never be able to say that.

Looks like I'm not the only one who has changed in this year.

And Sena…

"Is that so---- ?"

She dropped her shoulder, as if listening to Kuroneko' s speech drained her.

Then she laughed.

"So, your game's data was left at the club room now?"

"So, you'll help me?"

"No, not help."

"We are going to make this together."

…I'm such an arrogant idiot.

What 'I need to help her make a friend'. I was so ashamed of myself now. She didn't even need my help from the beginning.

But I'm still happy for her.

Next, everything started running well again.

After Sena came back, she and Makabe spent just two days and fixed everything.

Not only that, as if Sena wanted to make up for the time she wasted, she kept quarreling with Kuroneko.

Shouting to each other, disagreeing with each other, and helping each other at the same time. Unlike 'research and discuss', for this game, they both made it together.

From my point of view, both Kuroneko and Sena's quarreled about 'my idea is better for this game' which is the true form of 'research and discuss.'

Gradually, the game changed.

With Kuroneko's approval, we added RPG element.

The game's name was "Labyrinth of Lust" (Seven Sin 2).

The story was written by Kuroneko, while Sena took care of RPG part.

Luckily, both of their games used "dungeon" setting, so they could mix together pretty well.

--- Why didn't you just do that from the beginning? Well, I think that everyone wanted to ask too, but we didn't say anything.

The deadline was approaching, so both of them were very very busy. In the end, Sena even holed herself up in

the clubroom (Of course I planned to help, but one Kouhei Onii-chan chased me away.)

I was not exaggerating, they worked so hard that I thought they were possessed by a demon.

They pushed themselves to their absolutely limit, and yet inside, they were having fun.

Of course I couldn't do that.

--- In the day our game finished, they said to each other:

"I couldn't believe you actually can write 6 kilobytes of script per hour. I thought you were lying."

"You are pretty good too. To be able to clean so many bugs in such a small amount of time, is there any secret technique?"

"I based it all on my sixth sense."

"Sixth sense?"

"Yes. When I'm working on a game, I can see anything that is abnormal. That's why I'm so good at debugging

and balancing. In short, I take an overlook at everything, then fix whatever is out of place."

Hearing that, Makabe interrupted:

"So… when I first meet Akagi-san, she could easily figure out the boss's weakness, is that because of…?"

"Ah right. It's all the same. As long as it is data, there is no defense that I can't break."

Saying that, Sena proudly shook her chest, laughing " Hm hm".

What the heck? Did all gamers have some kind of special ability?

For some reason, Kuroneko seemed very excited:

"Are you saying …that if you take off your glasses, your special ability powers up?"

"How could you know that?"

"…How could that be… do the Mystic Eyes of Death Perception… really exist?"

Kuroneko's eyes widen in shock.

"You should feel honored, because from now on I will call you 'The Wielder of Mystic Eyes'."

"I'm getting an eighth-grade syndrome nick name?"

Thanks to that game, both Kuroneko and Sena acknowledged each other.

After that, well, although our game didn't get a prize, it still got a good reputation.

Club room, the next day.

"AAAAAAAA! Why! Why! Why! What the hell are those people thinking!!!"

"…So noisy. Don't get mad just because of some comments. They are mostly complaining about the script I wrote anyway, so why are you getting mad?"

"Of course I'm mad! It's our game! They dare to insult our game!"

"Whatever. I did what I wanted to do, then no one liked it. That's my responsibility alone."

"What about me? No one even complains about the gameplay which I made! Does that mean it's not even worth being criticized? And don't take full blame for everything. I have participated in making this game, so I have the right to feel excited or frustrated because of the outcome. Am I wrong?"

"Thank you Ms. Airhead. So, feel free to go ahead and be as frustrated as much as you want. Oh, by the way, if the nearby club complains, please go deal with them."

"Of course I will do that! Ah, that pissed me off so much! Agrrrrr! Damn! By the way, Gokou-san, why are you not frustrated at all? They bashed your script so much…"

With uninterested expression, Kuroneko said:

"..I'm used to it."

You meant 'I'm used to it, so I try to avoid displaying my emotions like you'.

There was no way she didn't feel regret.

You were right. She has endured Kumagai-san's criticism and Kirino's mockery.

Compared to Sena's reaction when faced with criticism , everyone could clearly see the difference between her and Kuroneko.

"Kousaka-senpai. Listen to me!"

"Hm? Huh? What?"

Your eyes were so scary Sena. Just… bah whatever, I will allow you to let it out today.

"Until now, I have always believed that getting emotional when faced with criticism just meant that the creator wasn't grateful enough to the player. I felt like 'if you have time to get emotional, why not try to make it better then?' But now, when my game gets criticized, I have changed my mind. Don't let your emotion get the better of you? Carefully analyze the review response? Eat shit! I'm so pissed off! You *****!"

"Calm, calm down. Girls shouldn't said things like shit and *****."

"Like I care! I will kill them! I will kill them all! All of them! I will kill every single one of them! Just you wait, you son of a *****. I will secretly join your group, then I will kill you all in your offline meeting."

Still speaking, Sena typed furiously in a series of 'clang clang'.

"Stop stop! The keyboard won't hold at this rate!"

"But…but!...Ah…."

She was clearly deeply frustrated.

I thought those criticizing us wouldn't have expected we had such a crazy creator.

"I don't think you should go that far…"

"Never!"

In the name of all game creators, I tried to calm Sena down.

Even Kuroneko couldn't stand it anymore, she said:

"Hey you… Stop blaming our players."

"I knew it. But I couldn't suppress my rage! Aarrrrrg… What should I do now! I can't focus on anything else!"

"Just make another game. One so good that it will shut all of them up."

Still typing in a constant speed, without looking, Kuroneko said that.

"This is much better than simply killing those human who dare to criticize us."

"…That's optimistic of you, Gokou-san."

"Hm, I just simply don't want to waste my time and think of another plan… Although, I do want to put those monkeys in their place. Are you in?"

"Of course! For the next game I will participate from the beginning – I will make another amazing game! First, the main character must have some muscle like in ' Terminator'!"

"Rejected…"

Finally, in this club room, Kuroneko gained a friend.

That's why I could praise her inside my heart:

You are really amazing, Kuroneko.

Chapter 4

It was after school on a particular day. As usual, I was with Manami heading towards the shoe cupboard area, and in the middle of that, we bumped into Kuroneko at a stair landing, who was sweeping away.

"Yoh."

"....."

I raised my hand in greeting in a friendly manner, but Kuroneko, after taking a fleeting glance at me, averted her eyes and started sweeping the stairs.

As usual, there was no sign of any other student on sweeping duty.

"Laters."

I smiled wryly and left that place.

As we reached the bottom of the stairs, Manami asked in a seemingly incredulous manner.

"Kyou-chan, is it really okay for us not to help her today?"

"It's fine."

That was no longer our job. I turned my gaze to the water-point at the ground floor, and took a glance at a particular girl who was wetting her mop. After she's done wringing the mop, she put it into the bucket and started walking towards here. On noticing me, she called out in a questioning voice.

"..... do you need anything from me? Kousaka senpai."

"Nope, do your best with the cleaning."

That's right. It's not my turn to appear on the stage.

With a tinge of loneliness, together with warm contentment, I left the place behind me.

"..... I see. Such a thing actually happened."

"Yeah. I really didn't put my hand in or anything of the sorts. Since in spite of me not doing anything at all, they somehow managed to take on everything by themselves."

While making our way to the shoe cupboard, I told Manami about what happened.

"But it wasn't entirely fruitless right?"

"Yeah, I think."

The reason for that was --- probably. Because it was the case of me having the intention of doing something for her sake. It was fine if she could make a friend and enjoy her school life here. Even if it's not by my hand. Because that was how I felt, I guess.

Being conscious of the unsophisticated motive that I had, if there was one thing that was strange.

It was perhaps the strange sensation that I've felt in my heart.

"In any case..... you've done your best, Kyou-chan."

With an air of fluffiness, she smiled gently.

Manami's words brought a closure within my heart with a clink.

"Orhh, haha, somehow, I feel refreshed."

"Fufu, well, any confidence in the mid-term test?"

"It'd be a breeze. Thanks to you."

"Hehe ~, you're welcome."

We walked slowly to the gate while chattering alongside each other.

A few petals fell from the roadside cherry trees whose cherry blossoms had already scattered quite some time ago.

It was at that time when the mobile at my butt was vibrating from a new message received.

"Ugh, sorry, got mail."

I excused myself, took out my mobile, and verified that two messages were received.

One was from Kuroneko, with no subject, and the body was a single short sentence written, *I'll be waiting behind the school building at half past three*. It sounded like a letter of challenge.

"..... wonder whether it was about something I did. "

It's kinda scary to receive such a mail from a junior. So to speak, if you have some business with me, you should have told me just now when you saw me. While tilting my head, I affirmed the second message.

And what was displayed was ---

"It, it's from Kirino!"

"Eh? Really?"

"Ah, ahh. The title is *"Re: Contact me"*, so she replied to the mail I sent out....."

What's with her? Replying only now! Slowww!

..... hm, anyhow, it must be about breaking a new record over there --- something like that. Or befriending some cute girls..... or having gotten a boyfriend..... So to speak, she must have sent something she's proud of to aggravate me. Still, Kuroneko, Saori, and Ayase are all worried about Kirino --- so that's all fine as long as we know that she's well. Everyone will be relieved.

"Hey, Kyou-chan, aren't you opening the mail?"

"Huh? Yeah..... right. Well, it's not like I'm going to reply, just so you know. There's no harm taking a look, I guess ~"

Click, I pressed the button hard. My heart was thumping wildly.

But the mail I got from my little sister betrayed my expectations.

Please throw away my entire collection that I've entrusted to you.

That was the only sentence written.

"....."

Perplexed, I stared at my little sister's reply mail in a dumbfounded manner.

Throw away my entire collection that I've entrusted to you ---

"*Please throw away*..... what's the meaning of this?"

The meaning of "*throw away*", in other words, is like saying "*take out the garbage*"?

No, no way. Definitely no way.

"Is this some kind of a metaphor?"

Even if I thought about it, I couldn't figure it out. I didn't choose to accept the contents of that message at face value. While it did flash into my mind for an instant, it was immediately cast aside. Because, it just wasn't possible.

How much she treasures that collection of hers..... aside from my little sister herself, in this world, the person who knows this best would be me. This was what I declare. There was no way that she would say *throw away my collection* to me. No way. Neither did I want to think about this.

Inside that collection, there is this "EX Meruru Special Figurine" which was jointly given by me, Ayase, Saori, and Kuroneko.

It also contains the “Stardust Witch Meruru” boxset that Kuroneko and I had watched together.

And also that “Let's fall in love with my little sister ♪” which led to her first life consultation with me ---

All of them, all of them, are inside there.

Something like --- throwing them away. There’s no way she’d say that, right?

“Kyou-chan, you don’t look too..... good?”

“ --- --- No, it’s noth..... che.”

I half ignored the incredulous looking Manami and called my little sister’s mobile right away.

No one picked up. Even after about ten rings, even after about twenty rings --- I couldn’t get to hear my little sister’s voice.

“This is not working.....”

Kun! What's with the "throwing it away"! Making others worried, you should have other things to say right !

…... let's use a different method. In any case, I need to do something to ascertain that this mail was a mistake. Anyhow, I'm absolutely convinced that this mail was a mistake. Absolutely convinced but ---

If I don't clarify it, I can't keep calm. Since there is too little, too little content.

"..... why don't I check with Ayase?"

That will be fine, right? There's no way Kirino will somehow contact me first before her best friend, Ayase, if it's Ayase, she might know something about Kirino.

Besides --- whichever way, I pretty much like Ayase.

Since I'm extremely hated by her, I'm hesitant about calling her without any reason. Thinking about it, this may be a good pretext.

"Alright, alright....."

I'm fired up. Wait for me, my lovely angel Ayase-tan.

I'm coming right now!

Likened to making an emergency escape mentally, or likened to running away from reality, I sorted out my emotions for a moment in order to calm myself.

In high spirits, I called the number which was given to me by Ayase previously.

As I did that ---

We are unable to comply with your wishes and cannot connect you to the number you are calling ---

We are unable to comply with your wishes and cannot connect you to the number you are calling ---

Click, tuu, tuu, tuu, tuu.....

"Unable to comply with your wishes, meaning I got blocked!?"

I cried. I cried in anguish with everything I've got.

Boohoohoohoo..... this is the first time I've heard a message on a communication block.....

The despair of the world seemed to have invaded my entire body, and crestfallen, my knees fell to the ground.

"..... it's, it's the end..... heh, hehe..... anything and everything..... has ended....."

Ter, terrible..... is it okay for such a cruel end to exist in this world?

Probably as a result of my earlier enthusiasm, I'm now afflicted with heavy damage. I can't stand up anymore.

Manami, who had been gazing at my abnormal actions , gingerly asked.

"Kyo, Kyou-chan.....? Is it perhaps that you want to contact Ayase-chan?"

"Eh?"

As I raised my face covered in my snot, Manami took out her own mobile and showed it to me.

Eh, isn't it that this fella normally doesn't carry her mobile along with her? Even if it's impudent, seems like she has come to the stage of adapting to modern times. Then again, I'm digressing.

"What? What's this?"

"Erm..... I've exchange mobile numbers with Ayase-chan....."

"Wait! How did you got on such good terms with Ayase!?"

"Ehhehe..... somehow ~"

Somehow my foot! What, what's with this combination..... isn't it way beyond my expectations.....

That aside, specifically how long have they been on such good terms? Didn't they meet only in January?

I've never thought that there will be common topics between a grandma and a middle school girl.....

U~m. I don't get it. What do they talk about after exchanging mobile numbers?

Well..... even for me, I've made new friends with Saori and Kuroneko, and I don't really care who she becomes on good terms with..... but what is it..... somehow, it feels kinda lonely..... kinda irritated..... Wait, what's with me getting jealous of Ayase! Am I an idiot!

"Well, then, I'll entrust it to you."

"Right. Okay."

Manami put her phone readily to her ear, and after exchanging one or two lines, "Here you go", and she passed it to me. I took it from her and switched it with mine.

"..... hel, hello?"

"--- long time no see, Onii-san."

Woah, it's really Ayase! It's my angel Ayase-tan!

"Long time no see my foot! Why did you block my number!? Did I do something!?"

No, indeed, during last year's Natsukomi, there's one particular matter where I really did **something**! But, arguably, since then, a matter which could earn me a communication block --- isn't there like none!

"Eh? You've only notice it now? The block was in place since half a year ago however."

"Seriously!"

Speaking of that, I've always been communicating with Ayase through mail.

The truth was that I've been blocked ever since summer..... Sob..... I never knew that.....

"..... what is it? Could it be that you've purposely asked Onee-san for help in calling me just for that? If that 's the case, it's really a bother, and I'd like for you to stop. "

My heart seemed about to break! To be told off in this manner by a middle school girl, is there anyone who wouldn't cry?

Ever since I've met her, whenever I play eroge, I'll definitely start with clearing the routes of girls with long black hair, but yet, I feel upset when I'm treated like a hentai. It seems like there is no way I can impress her on my upright and clean-handed character.

Well, since I have to resolve her misunderstanding, there's no helping it.

"That's not it. It's just that there's something I want to ask you."

"Something you want to ask me?"

"Yeah. It's about my little sister --- however."

The effect of that line was instantaneous.

"About..... Kirino?"

Even over the phone, I could tell Ayase's seriousness just went up a few notches.

"Yeah. Since then --- did Kirino contact you?"

After Kirino went for overseas studies, there was one time Ayase and I meet up to talk.

At that time, she had never heard anything from Kirino. She appeared to be in a pain as she talked about how Kirino never contacted her.

After several months had passed..... I was wondering about whether there was any change in the situation on her side.

"..... no. Not even once since then..... I've sent out tons of mail but..... there was no reply..... at all."

At the last part, she was almost in tears.

"Onii-san..... I'm..... hated by Kirino right....."

"No way that would ever happen!"

I raised my voice over the phone unintentionally. Kirino's actions can be ambiguous at times, but, out of all people, I least wanted to hear those words from Ayase.

"..... I know full well about how much pain she was in. ..... when she had a fight with you..... Just going by that

alone, there's no way she'll hate you. Then again, even if I don't say that..... you should be most aware of that right."

"..... yeah, you're right..... I'm sorry."

"No, I'm sorry as well..... for shouting at you."

So it seemed.

Kirino that brat --- since then, she didn't even contact Ayase once.....

If that's the case, what's with that mail? She sent one and only to me --- and the content was, *"throw away all my collection"*.....

A joke? A bad prank? If so, it's still fine, after getting in touch with her, I'll just go *"Don't mess around with me!"* at her, and that would be the end of the story.

However, joke and bad prank aside, for her not to contact even her best friend.....

What should I do? What should I do?

"Onii-san? Erm, what happened to Kirino? Could it be she's in an accident ---"

"No, nothing happened, don't be worried."

I tried my best to keep a normal voice in order not to arouse Ayase's suspicion.

….. there's no way I can tell her, regarding this matter.

"She has not contacted me as well..... so even I became worried. That's why I gave you a call."

"Is that so..... she didn't even contact Onii-san..... ….. I..... I think Kirino must have a very strong reason for not contacting us."

"Yeah."

I thought so too. As to why it was, I have no idea, but it's certainly strange for her not to contact the people she likes a lot, such as Ayase and Kuroneko.

"But..... but even so..... if say Kirino were to contact us ..... I think she'll contact Onii-san. At that time....."

Ayase paused at what she wanted to say, and continued with a considerate, thick, gentle voice.

"At that time, please become Kirino's strength."

"..... I understand."

.....

..... how?

After ending our conversation, I said goodbye to Manami and headed off to the appointed place to meet Kuroneko.

However, my head was filled with the matter regarding Kirino's mail.

My pace slowed naturally and before long, I came to a complete stop.

I took out my mobile and once again gazed at the mail Kirino had sent.

I had thought that if Kirino were to contact one of us, it would have to be Ayase.

However, she was thinking entirely the same thing as me.

If say Kirino were to contact us..... I think she'll contact Onii-san.

This is stupid. Why will that be so, I don't get it. Certainly, I was the one with whom she secretly engaged in life consultation several times. But that would be because there wasn't any other suitable candidate, and even if I were to hate her after knowing her secret, it wouldn't be a problem for her ---

--- no, that's not it.

I know. She has only said it to me. I returned the words which I yelled at Ayase back to myself. I should be most aware of this.

After all, I heard it with these ears. *I'm very grateful* --- those words, they were properly engraved into my heart. I'd never forget them.

Even for a dull person like me, in a straight manner, she said that to me.

No matter how much I've misunderstood her, having seen that, even I have realized it.

Pah (sfx). I folded closed the phone and started walking once more.

As appointed by the mail, when I went to the back of the school building at half-past three, Kuroneko, was waiting in her school uniform. After her cleaning duties ended, she must have stayed back at school. She was sitting on the bench on which she sometimes sits alone eating her Meruru bento.

Having noticed me, Kuroneko stood up. In a hardly audible voice,

"..... er..... erm....."

As she was saying that, she looked at my face, opened her mouth and went "ah", as if she noticed something. Her eyebrows knitted as if she was pondering about something --- and said in a low voice.

"--- you look terribly unwell, don't you."

"..... is that so?"

"Yes. It's as if you just saw the end of the world, you know."

That's because. I'm only on the receiving end of the double punches from Kirino and Ayase, you see.

"..... hm. Somehow --- it seems like the circumstances were not brought about by deeds. Alright, try telling me about what happened. Since I'll make an exception and listen to you."

I was somewhat concerned about what she meant by " deeds" however ---

"The truth is I received a strange mail from Kirino ---"

..... that's right. It might be good for her to hear me out about this matter.

In terms of being a best friend to Kirino, this person won't lose to Ayase, that's the reason why.

Kuroneko kept silent and listened to me as I explained.

"..... and that's about it."

Kuroneko, who had her eyes shut, opened them slowly.

"--- and? Why are you still tarrying about here?"

After listening to the story, that was the first thing she said as she opened her mouth.

"Eh?"

"Why are you here, answering to my summons? That's what I'm asking."

Kuroneko was silently angry. She appeared irritated, disdainful, and mortified. As always, she spitted out her provoking, mortifying curses.

"No, but, with only such a short mail ---"

"*With only such a short mail*, isn't this more than enough ? It's obvious that she's trapped in a situation which forces her to send such a mail. Or is your sister the kind of person who would say such a thing based on a joke or a whim, I wonder? Even to me, who has only known her in such a short amount of time, it is plainly evident."

Please throw away my entire collection that I've entrusted to you.

She couldn't have said that. Even though I should have known better ---

"But she's in America right now ---"

"So what? It's not a great problem, is it? It's not about returning to the demon world, nor about falling into hell. She's just not contactable though. You know where she is , there is a way to get there, you are conscious of your own worry --- and what else is needed?"

Kuroneko bit her lower lip with her 'giri' sound.

As she did that, it sounded like a dark, heavy voice that reverberated from the depths of hell.

"You are really, really really really --- the worst useless incompetent person, Senpai. An indecisive, blockhead with bad sense, a lecherous, idiotic, lazy trash --- but yet strangely gentle. You have a bad personality just like your sister. What a pair of siblings bearing such strong resemblance, jeez."

I have nothing to retort.

After the reprimand, the place was filled with silence. After having spent some time together with Kuroneko, based on experience, I remained silent. With regards to her, there was a meaning to her silence. A form of communication called silence.

As we looked at each other without saying anything, after a brief amount of time had passed. Before long.....

"I have something to report."

Kuroneko sighed as she muttered. As she said a line which was unnatural to the continuity of the current matter, in a baffled voice, I responded with an

"Ehh?"

"It's because there has been quite a few changes. ..... such as about the class, various matters. That's why..... I' m reporting it for now."

She spoke her words haltingly. As usual, she's not too good with words. Normally, she won't be able to communicate effectively with the other party in such a roundabout manner. But, it's now clear to me. I can make

a guess as to why I was called here. She probably wanted to thank me. That's why, the conversation flow might sound strange just by hearing our lines alone, but this was my reply.

"..... no, I didn't really do anything significant."

"Indeed, you weren't much of a help."

She agreed on that!? Wasn't she supposed to disagree with me by saying *"No, that's not it"*!?

"But, I was happy."

"....."

"..... when you said that you were worried about me but not in your sister's place; I was happy to hear that."

Kuroneko cast her eyes downwards as she spoke.

W, wait..... what is she..... saying.....

"*Not 'Nii-san', 'Senpai' is better*, you've said to me; I was happy to hear that."

Is she nervous? Her folded hands before her skirt were shaking.

"Joining the same club with me, worried about whether I'm isolated in class, backing me up on the presentation, staying with me till it's time to kill time with Tamura-senpai."

"I was very happy."

--- I thought I'll die. Dumbfounded, my jaw dropped.

Anyone who's receiving such an expression of gratitude from the smiling face of a normally dishonest, condescending girl would have reacted in the same manner.

This overwhelming surprise threw me into a state of confusion.

I didn't know what to say in reply, but somehow, I opened my mouth.

"Is, that so?"

For an instant, I forgot to breathe before her.

In that manner, I couldn't take my eyes off Kuroneko.

"I think you are just as dishonest as me though."

"Eh?"

"I've said what I wanted to say honestly. So --- what are you going to do?"

" --- ---"

Ahh, that's right.

This person is telling me *it's fine to do this* and used herself as an example.

Really, this girl --- how do I put it? I seem to be close to falling in love with her.

Within my intoxicated brain, I made the obvious decision in an obvious manner --- I've decided.

"I'm going to go see Kirino."

"..... I see."

Kuroneko cast her eyes down contentedly, and said with a gentle voice.

Her speech became curt again.

So as to speak, was it awkward when this happened in the past?

It was no longer so right now.

"That's the end of my report."

"Is that so?"

I clasped my fist and turned on my heel.

"Well then, I'm off."

"Wait a minute", I heard from behind me. Then I heard the sound of footsteps rushing up to me.

As I turned around ---

There was a soft feeling on my cheek.

Leaving a faint sweet scent, the blushing face of Kuroneko pulled away.

"..... wha..... what....."

Are you doing..... My voice trailed off before I could say what I wanted to say.

What is..... what is the meaning of this?

Kuroneko read my inner question from my expression and replied.

"..... a 'curse'. A curse that will kill you if you waver and wimp out. The curse will not be lifted until you fulfill my wishes..... Pitiful, if you leave it alone, your whole body will start spurting blood, writhing and rolling back and forth on the ground till you die."

Even as she was blushing up to her ears, she had a boundlessly evil smirk on her face.

"If you've already understood, quickly disappear from my sight. This time, you can go meddle in your little sister's affairs."

She then sent me off by pushing me from behind with all her strength towards the direction of the sky's horizon .

The departing flight from Narita Airport appeared to have finally stopped its ascent. Having clung to half of the seat in front of me from the great fear I had, I breathed out a sigh of relief as I looked up.

I traced along my cheek with my finger.

Even now, there was still a soft lingering warmth there ---

"..... a curse indeed."

I'm unable to judge what kind of intentions she has for her to do this.

Was it to cheer me up and give me a push from behind ?

Was it because she wanted me to go help her dear friend Kirino?

Was it an impulse to play a prank on me? --- Or...

I'll leave that aside for now. Once everything has finished, after returning to Japan, I'll start pondering about it again.

At any rate, it seems like I'm greatly indebted to her.

Thanks to her, I'm here doing this right now. I'm kind of surprised that it had only been a few hours ago.

After that, on returning home, for some reason, my old man was in and I tried discussing with him about the matter regarding Kirino.

"Great! Go ahead!"

The old man was extremely enthusiastic about it.

He took out a suitcase from his room and with lots of vigor, put it down with a large 'dong' sound.

"Whatever you will need are all inside this. Feel free to take it along with you."

Why was it that he had everything perfectly prepared for a trip? Why was the old man at home in the evening?

I didn't ask him all that, neither was there a need to ask.

" --- Kyousuke. I shall leave everything in your hands. I'm entrusting this to you."

Gratitude was embedded within those strong forceful words.

I arrived at my destination airport and opened the map I got from my old man.

While this was the second time I went on an overseas trip (the first being my junior high school excursion to Hawaii), to be honest, I had no confidence in my ability to arrive safely at Kirino's residence.

What do you mean by *what a miserable fella in spite of getting all worked up to come here*? Don't be stupid! I can't

speak the language here well enough, unfamiliar with the land here, and didn't even have time to buy a single thing.

Of course I was scared! Ku, if, if my luggage got snatched..... super scary, I don't even want to think about it. In the worst case, I wouldn't have a choice but to call the dormitory number that the old man gave me and call Kirino out --- to come pick me up!

That was the last thing..... that was the last thing I wanted. Worrying my own little sister, and receiving her help; it's no longer the question of how miserable I would become. It's a matter of losing my pride as a big brother.

Tough, but such needless worry came to an end. Because the travel items that I've received from my old man were meticulously prepared. There was a travel guidebook with lots of memo paper, affixed into it with clips, which detailed how best to get to my destination from the airport --- transport guide, map, money, situational conversation manual, et cetera --- perfectly prepared to the point that whatever I needed was inside.

"As expected of my old man! These preliminary preparations ain't too shabby!"

He did this despite hating overseas travel and had never gone on any trips at all.

In order to go meet his daughter --- he did all this research. Sounds like my old man alright. That's what I really thought.

Following the directions of my old man's memo, I got on a taxi from Los Angeles International Airport.

The driver was a black man, the type that Sena[5] is particularly fond of, and after showing him the corresponding page from my old man's memo (the address was written in English), he said something and nodded, appearing to understand it.

I didn't exactly get what he said but it seemed something like, *Okay boy, leave it to me*.

Is it really okay? Will he bring me to a remote place and kill me.....

Thanks to a certain someone, I will remember that feeling of fear towards burly men.

Carrying that worthless unsettled feeling, I gazed out of the window to view the cityscape of Los Angeles.

It's the sea. On the other side were stretches of soaring mountains.

The time difference was seventeen hours. The climate was warm, and it didn't feel too different from that of Japan.

So as to speak, since America is said to be a free country, I would expect it to be entirely different from Japan and the trip here would be more straining, but it's surprisingly not so. Perhaps, those were the thoughts I had on arriving, but the only things that seemed foreign were the wideness of the roads, the cars were all driven on the right side, and lots of foreigners walking in the area, and that's about it.

Honestly speaking, the first time when I went to Akiba , I was much more surprised.

Well, in Los Angeles, there weren't any maids walking around distributing leaflets.

Ignoring my unease, the car journey was smooth. As to how smooth it was, it was smooth like running on deserted streets of Chiba. Not the slightest congestion was present.

Whenever the driver made a right turn when the light was red, I was initially nervous about it, but somehow, it seemed like this sort of traffic rule does exist. I had no idea at all.

After running along the freeway for quite some time --- by the time I reached my destination, it was already dusk.

"So this is the dorm, er, rather, it's a house."

It was a white, two-story wooden residence. Looks like a new building, standing conspicuously without a blemish, and sparkling clean.

On top of that, it was pretty spacious. And there was equipment outside that appeared to be for barbecue use, it was pretty much like a campsite. As I had imagined

this to be undoubtedly an apartment type, I was somewhat perplexed by what I saw.

I wonder how many of such houses do they have here?

I rang the intercom, and waited for a while.

But..... as expected of America, what a huge luxurious home.

It might kind of suit the taste of that flashy girl.

As I pondered, the door opened and a familiar face appeared.

In spite of having expected such a scene before, my heart still tightened and felt like it was going to give way.

I took a deep breath softly, and made a smiling face. As I was feeling nervous, my body might have stiffened a little.

"Yoh, long time no see."

"..... what..... are you..... doing here....."

The voice of the little sister which I hadn't heard for months. Woah, surprise, surprise.

"You know..... is it such a weird thing for me to come see you?"

"It's, it's weird indeed."

She told me straightly. Or rather, how heartless did my little sister think I was.....

…... che. I form a 'heh' word with my mouth and adopted a frowning expression.

I will try to ascertain the matter I've heard from my old man.

"I've heard that recently, your health wasn't doing too good."

"..... it's not a big deal. Just something like a flu."

"I've heard it's been going on since February. Our old man is worried as well."

If I hadn't taken any action, it seemed like he would probably have flown here himself.

"..... I see..... father....."

Kirino hung her head down dejectedly. And the front fringe of her hair drooped swiftly.

..... her hair had grown longer.

Her appearance reminded me of the time when she was sick from influenza and had to stay in bed.

Looking at her comfortable home casual dressing, could it be that she had been sleeping before this? And her face seemed pretty pale, compared to the last time I saw her, she looked kind of worn out. To begin with, she's doing modeling work and already has a slender build... ... what would happen if she went on further to become thinner?

"Not just the old man. Ayase, Kuroneko, Saori as well --- everyone is extremely worried about you, you know? Why didn't you contact them at all?"

"..... che. That's none of your business, isn't it?"

Kirino pushed her hair back and bit her lower lip.

I hadn't heard those words in ages. Che, in other words, it was the kind of rebuke that I'm so used to.

It's nostalgic. This feeling of extreme annoyance was nostalgic.

Kirino gave me a glare of extreme displeasure, then snapped at me in a hateful tone.

"..... that aside..... what did you come here for?"

Good timing, I was just waiting for that.

I slowly opened the suitcase, rummaged through the items, and brought out a transparent plastic DVD case. As I showed it to her, Kirino's eyes went wide.

"That's..... what I gave you....."

"Yeah."

The DVD I was showing to her was the one that I received from my little sister some time ago, the game disc for **"Sis x Sis ~ Siscon Love Story ~"**. Imitating club president Miura's wide double tooth grin,

"I've come here to play eroge."

Several minutes later ---

"..... I don't get the meaning of this..... I ultra-don't get the meaning of this..... Why should I, who should have been studying abroad in America, be playing an eroge beside you....."

It was inside Kirino's room in the dorm.

We were sitting at the side table beside the bed, where the laptop was placed.

And in the midst of playing the aforementioned "**Sis x Sis**".

We were just at the end of the opening event, and about to go into the main story.

Kirino, with a sour look, was miffed.....

It was as if I was looking at the same scene as the one on that day when she left Japan.

"Wasn't it you who said, *Understood, let's play*?"

"That's because you were harping about *eroge eroge* outside, and that was the only thing I could say in that situation! Don't you have any sense of delicacy at all! It'd have been bad if someone else heard that!"

Speaking of that, was it because America was stricter than Japan when it comes to eroge?

"My bad."

"Che, do you really get it? That aside, we haven't gotten to the main point yet, other than playing eroge with me, let's hear the real reason behind why you're here?"

"Well, isn't this fine? Don't worry about the small details."

"Do you understand what you're saying? You flew all the way here because you want to play eroge with your little sister, and yet you said, *Don't worry about the small details*?"

The details certainly weren't small. Looking at this objectively, I'm a hentai.

But you will get angry if I tell you the real reason. That 's why I couldn't say it.

"..... sigh..... I seriously don't get this."

Even as she said that, she wasn't really displeased. It seemed like her health wasn't as bad as I've feared, and my heart started to feel more at ease. ..... ya, despite saying that, it's not like I was worried to the extreme or anything of that sort.

"What are you looking at?"

Kirino snapped irritatedly. As I wiped off the grin on my face, I looked around the room.

The first thing that caught my eye was the double deck bed. Somehow, it seemed like this was a room for two. According to Kirino, this kind of dormitory has several such rooms, and about ten girls lived here together. Of course, they were all assembled from different parts of the world, track-and-field elites of the same generation.

But right now, only the two of us were in this home. As a matter of fact, it seemed like before I could enter this dormitory, Kirino would have to seek permission from

the school, and the teachers would take into consideration the reunion between "**two close siblings**" and make things convenient for me. Currently at this time, since her roommates were out training, there was no special preparation done, but with regards to whether the two of us could spend the night alone privately, a proper request would have to be made.

"Well, the truth is, I'm pretty lucky, it seems."

"..... don't do any weird stuff just because we are alone here."

"As if I will!"

Generally speaking, it would be a different story if she was a cute junior, but to be self-conscious just because I was alone with a bratty little sister, it would be just plain annoying. Idiot, you are getting too self-conscious! There's no way I will lay my hands on my little sister!

"..... hng, that so."

She turned the other way in an obnoxious manner, with displeasure. One second later, she glanced in my direction.

"Contrary to what you said, don't you look pleased after knowing you can spend the night with your little sister? Ahh, yuck, yuck, eeww ---, oh gosh, at this rate, won't you ---, have come all the way here to take advantage of an opening to steal my underwear ---? Won 't you go *sniff sniff* on them ---?"

"N~o W~a~y duh."

Irritating. Irritating irritating. Even though I just saw her for only a few minutes, I already felt like going back!

"Be quiet and look at the screen."

I frowned and formed the shape of a 'heh' word with my mouth as I was spamming away left clicks all this while. That's why even as we were talking, the game play had advanced to the heart-throbbing school life of the sisters. The skill of being able to play an eroge in the middle of a conversation was one that I've obtained through experience. Even though it served its use now, it 's not a skill I could boast with pride.

By the way, as I was playing the game, I was bothered by something,

"Hey, you can't play eroge when your roommates are around right?"

"That's right!"

"Woahh!?"

I came to grips with something big. Kirino responded to the nagging doubt I had and started complaining in a teary voice.

"Even if it's me, there's no way I can play eroge in front of all those pure innocent girls younger than me. To think that I've actually taken the trouble to install a heap load of eroge that I haven't cleared, and impressively brought them past customs into America! And yet I can't play them at all! Uuw..... for, for me to actually accumulate games.....! Mortifying.....!"

Kirino was gritting her teeth and clenching her fist tightly as she said that. You, you.....!

Although I had somewhat anticipated it, but still, to think that you really brought your eroge into America!

"Hah, if you want to laugh, just laugh!?"

"I'm not laughing duh!"

This is really bad! If she was caught, won't this hit the news?

Well, I'll be the one to talk.

"Bu, but, you did well in persevering till this point..... I'll give you that."

"Yeah..... now, after coming to this country, I totally understand how the guys feel when they secretly watch porn when their parents are not around."

"Wha, you did play them anyway!"

I wouldn't care even if you get caught, you know! Even if I'm your brother, there's no way I, having come all the way to a foreign country in a hurry, would cover up for you by saying, *"This is my game!"*, you know?

"And..... we are almost getting to the first choice....."

On the screen was the scene in which the two heroines, side by side, were pressing the protagonist to answer to the question, *"Whose bento was delicious?"*. The protagonist went with the safe answer, *"Both were*

delicious.”, which of course couldn’t be possibly accepted --- *”Choose one!”*, he was forced, so as to speak.

1. …... Surprisingly, the bento from Rinko was more delicious.

2. …... Of course, the bento from Miyabi was more delicious.

“At any rate, you are going to start capturing from long black-haired ‘Miyabi-chan’, aren’t you?”

A big brother whose eroge capturing tendencies were within the grasp of his little sister..... I feel like dying, oiy .

“..... fu, fu. Why are you talking as if you know everything about other people’s taste? You are off the mark duh. Today..... that’s right. The one on the right side, who keeps running *”Stupid Aniki!”* off her mouth, that conceited looking little sister. I’ll start with her route. ”

“Eh? Rinko route? …... are you going to start now?”

For some reason, Kirino was queerly dismayed.

"Wait! Rinko-rin's scenario is not allowed."

"Ah? Why?"

"Not, nothing!"

"What's that? Geez, weren't you the one who said *think of this game as myself and treasure it well*. But yet, why is there a *You-can't-play-this* route in it?"

"That's because! Erm..... that..... any --- anyway, you can't play that! I thought that I gave that to you as a present so that when you feel lonely without me, you can play it by yourself in your own room, jeez!? --- why didn' t you play it over there and instead brought it all the way to America to play it with me!? This is really beyond my expectations!"

What the hell made you snap!? Is there a need to make such a fuss about playing Rinko-rin scenario? I don't get it.

"Well, well..... if you insist, I won't play it though."

Besides, I actually prefer the long black-hair one. I chose choice number two, **Of course, the bento from Miyabi was more delicious**. I'm already familiar with this particular route.

In the orthodox advertisements of **Sis x Sis**, **Rinko** and **Miyabi** were featured as the main heroines, so as to speak, it was a game of double heroines. The main characteristic of this game is the crazy scenario presented by the triangular relationship formed with both younger blood sisters. Despite how transient these things are, in the **Eroge Review Column** of many large game review sites, it was highly acclaimed and hailed as **One of the Most Outstanding Nakige**. As usual, it feels like there's something wrong with the world I live in.

As the game was being played, the exchanges between us gradually decreased --- and a few hours went by.

And then, as we passed the middle stage, Kirino heaved a sigh as she murmured.

"Hey..... what about you?"

"..... what do you mean by *what about you*?"

"Well..... everybody is worried about me, isn't it? ….. what about you?"

"Of course, I'm worried as well."

Don't ask me for the obvious, duh. If not so, why else would I come all the way here.

I answered without meeting her eyes.

"..... fuun[6]."

Our conversation stopped once again. Sitting beside the bed, we continued playing the game.

The BGM, character voices, and clicking sounds of the mouse reverberated across the room.

This time round, it was me who asked in a sighing tone.

"What about you."

"..... what?"

"Did you feel lonely when you didn't get to see me?"

"Are you an idiot? There's no way that would happen right....."

"That so? I was lonely, you know."

"..... ehh?"

"What about it?"

"Not, nothing..... fuun..... is that so? ….. so you were lonely without me."

"Righto. I was super lonely, and got scolded by Kuroneko. *Don't take me as your little sister's substitute*, she said."

"Siscon."

"Shut up."

As we carried out those short exchanges, the game continued to progress.

Click, click, click..... The sound of rhythmic clicking.

"..... speaking of that. That black one, I heard she went to the same school as you?"

"Yeah. Thanks to you spreading some strange things about Manami, it was troublesome, you know."

I told her about the incident where Kuroneko and I made a game together.

Kirino listened without saying a word.

"..... fuun. As I thought..... she looks like one who sucks at interacting with others, and probably a lone wolf at school. And then, you put your hand into it..... and helped her to make friends....."

"I didn't do anything actually. They became friends all by themselves."

"Ah, that so?"

"Are you jealous that your friend was stolen?"

"Not at all. Tch, I mean, anyway she's just a net friend, that's all there is to it. Since it's about time I got tired of that girl, it's just nice that some pushy people came out from nowhere."

Seems like these two are more or less on the same tune on this.

"Don't say that. You know, you went missing without telling her anything. And she got all depressed because of that, you know?"

"Her?"

"Yeah."

I acknowledged loudly.

"The truth is..... she really wanted to make that game with you, you know?"

"Fuun."

Kirino took a sniff. She sat on the bed, grasping her knees, and buried her face into her knees.

Her long hair fell over.

Wanting to meet her friends. Wanting to hear their voices. Wanting to play with them --- she appeared to be saying all that.

That's right. It's not possible for her not to think about all these. Because Kirino really loves her friends.

But why has she not contacted anyone even till now?

"I brought the game we made. Let's play it later."

"..... I don't really mind."

Once again, our conversation was cut off. It was not an awkward silence. How should I put it..... it was somewhat closer to the atmosphere when I'm with Manami, like that of lukewarm water. Using such an analogy may sound weird with regards to my real little sister, but somehow, it was the kind of warmth that one would feel when one spends time with one's family.

"Coach didn't allow me to go to practice today..... even though I told him that I'm fine, but he paid no heed to me at all..... and I was getting a little depressed."

Kirino was gazing at the screen of **Sis x Sis** that I was playing with an affectionate look.

"Playing eroge somehow makes me feel much better."

"..... that's great, isn't it."

..... an earth-shattering line.

"The way you said that sounds real perverted though. It's been a while since I could do what I like to my heart's content, you know..... and it makes me real happy."

The thing she like = eroge, so as to speak, a junior high school student who could say that openly is pretty rare. Of course, this girl must have completed **Sis x Sis** in its entirety, but despite that, she could still derive such pleasure on a replay..... just goes to show how much she loves it. That's it, right. During that time, she did hand it to me with brimming confidence. At any rate --- one won 't normally say such stupid lines even in one's own heart ---

It was a good thing that I brought an eroge here.

The time was ripe. I let out a small breath --- and asked the thing that I had wanted to ask.

Without stopping my clicks, and with eyes on the display,

"What..... was that mail about?"

"..... just as it was written."

"To throw away the entire collection that you've left with me?"

"..... yea, yeah."

"Is that really ok?"

As I attempted to seek out confirmation from her face, she averted her eyes.

"..... didn't I..... already say it?"

"**"EX Meruru Special Figure"**, **"Stardust Witch Meruru DVD Box"**, **"Let's fall in love with my little sister ♪"**, **"Maschera DVD Box"**, **"Scatology * Sisters"**, **" Big Bro's Panties"**, **"Scum Little Sister"**..... the secret collection which you showed me before you left..... is it really ok to throw all of them away?"

Even though I sounded like an idiot, I asked in earnest.

Because I had to ascertain this girl's true feelings.

"..... yeah."

There was a trail of a tear streaking across her cheek.

But yet ---

"Throw them away, everything."

I see.

She was serious about it.

"Reason?"

"..... if I don't do that, the naivety from within me wouldn't disappear."

"Naivety?"

"Yeah....."

Little by little, Kirino started filling me in.

"I've already known right from the start that my ability can't pass for one among these track-and-field elites assembled from all around the world. In the first place, I came for this abroad study program in order to accumulate experience. I knew that it's not possible for me to just become good right at the start..... that's why, when I came here, I imposed a restriction on myself."

"Restriction?"

"Yeah. A restriction in which I couldn't contact any of my friends in Japan till I beat one of these elites in an official time-attack race."

"--- ---"

So, that's it. That's why, without saying a word, she went abroad all by herself.

"When I set the restriction, I thought that it was a great , challenging goal and things would work out somehow, marginally at worst, if I give it my best shot. *They must be worried about me*, I thought, *I'm really sorry*, I thought, but *it'd be fine as long as I win*, I would win with this in mind, then explain my circumstances and apologize. But....."

I could not hear her teary voice beyond that. I didn't need to.

You didn't win right..... not even once since you came here.

"In spite of having attained such results in Japan....."

That's why she couldn't contact Ayase or Kuroneko.

"Since I'm already relatively used to such a deplorable state..... I'm not too bothered by it."

Hehe, she laughed in self-contempt, but completely devoid in energy, her voice became soft.

"I really feel apologetic towards everyone....."

Even when engulfed in chagrin and suffering, bounded by her own self-imposed restriction, she would neither whine nor ask for help from anyone else.

Unlike in Japan, it's difficult to even seek an hour of sanctuary through her games or anime here.

The only person she could contact was not any of her friends, but her big brother. To top it off, contrary to expectations of some sort of a request, it was an order to deal a penalty to her worthless self. How stoic could this girl be?

"..... stupid idiot."

I understood it well. In short, this was the level of her determination.

The Kirino, who appeared to be perfect in every way, was not necessarily strong in her spirit.

Rather, her true nature is one of immature fragility. Getting depressed on the onset of difficulties was normal .

Just like the time when she cried over her broken friendship with Ayase.

Just like the time when she cried over her mobile novel getting ripped off.

Just like the time when she cried over her parents' denial of her hobbies.

In spite of that --- she possesses an extraordinary strong sense of responsibility and tenacity.

The drive to accomplish whatever comes along her way. Using that as her weapon, Kirino has managed to come this far, but now, it didn’t serve her. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect.

It was as if she was hitting the body of a wall of cold, hard steel, over and over again.

With extreme resoluteness, firmness, earnestness. However, the towering wall was too massive and solid.

It was no wonder that she would collapse, emotionally speaking of course.

--- so glad I came. So glad that I was in time before it's too late.

I resumed the game that had been suspended for an hour. I averted my eyes from Kirino and fixed them onto the display.

This girl probably wouldn't want me to see her crying.

At the side of the sobbing Kirino, the clicks continued indifferently.

What was unfolding on the screen was the climax scene of Miyabi's route.

The little sister, whose days were numbered, confessed the feelings of love that she had kept hidden all this while.....

It was a heart-wrenching scene. Honestly speaking, the storyline is a conventional one, and it's not something

that suits my taste. But yet, somehow, I felt overwhelmed .

A soft piano melody drifted from the speakers of the laptop.

I stopped my finger from clicking ---

“Let’s go back together.”

“..... eh?”

Bah (sfx). Kirino vigorously turned her head towards me.

“What are you saying? Didn’t I tell to throw everything away!”

“I threw nothing.”

I continued staring at the screen as I replied.

“Why --- “

"Didn't I make a promise to you. I'll take care of them before you come back. That's why I didn't throw them away. Even if you ask for it."

"But, but..... I..... I've yet to."

I've yet to accomplish anything. I've yet to achieve anything. That's probably what she wanted to say.

I came here intending to bring Kirino back to Japan. Right now, the determination which Kirino has preciously held on to for a long time was going to be crushed by me. Perhaps, it was a cruel thing to do. Perhaps, I was imposing my own whim on her. But even so, that was what I wanted to do.

Just like the time when I couldn't leave the solitary Kuroneko alone.

This time round, I'm going to self-righteously meddle in my own little sister's affairs.

"Even when I..... have been getting worked up at you, and snapping at everyone demeaningly..... and coming

here abroad for athletic studies. Not even a half a year had gone by; this really won't do; to turn tail and go back to Japan.....?"

With her head drooping, and her body trembling.

She jerked her head up and shouted.

"There's no way I can do that right! What a pathetic thing! Who do you think I am!?"

"My little sister!"

I put my face close to hers and shouted back.

"..... I, I don't get you....."

"You are my little sister! What's wrong with me getting worried about you! Your body's not doing too good, isn't it? It's tough, isn't it? You really wanted to chat with your friends, and hang out with them right? If that's the case, just come back to Japan!"

"I can't do that! Not when I can't even win against the youngest girl here! How would I be able to explain such a sorry state to those I've beaten back home!"

"There's nothing to explain. You may have your pride. You may have a strong sense of responsibility. But, no matter what, you've overextended yourself."

"I did not! If I haven't gone to such an extent, I wouldn 't have been able to win my way till here! What do you know!? About the feelings..... that I've carried for track-and-field all this while....."

Bang! Kirino punched her fist against the wall. Her face grimaced in pain for an instant, then she choked out her words in a tearful voice.

"Someone like you, will never understand."

"Perhaps."

I'll admit that. For a person like me who had ignored her, treating her as non-existent all this while, I don't have the right to lecture her.

"But you know. Being so adamant at this point, obstinately remaining here..... is that going to help you win? You keep collapsing; didn't coach tell you to take a break from training today as well? Do you think you can catch up to those people whom you are no match for, when you can't even see what's happening around you?"

"That doesn't matter. I must definitely win. That's why I'm going to win. That's all there is to it."

An unreasonable argument. It was akin to saying she could resolve everything with just her willpower alone.

It seemed like she used to be a slowpoke in running. I just thought of this. Perhaps --- Kirino just maybe wasn't that blessed with a talent for track-and-field after all.

Perhaps, all this while, to compensate for her lack of talent, she had been using the fighting spirit and willpower she had just shown me to blast away her opponents and made it all the way here.

Drawing out a strength beyond her limits, bearing an impassive preparedness.

Those were the secrets of Kousaka Kirino's speed.

Such as maintaining a full acceleration as she runs. While the meandering curves may not matter, even as the sharp curve comes looming in, knowing that a crash is inevitable, Kirino can't afford to brake. Otherwise, she can't win.

"Isn't it okay to just have a fresh start? You're too impatient. Let's go back for now, allow yourself to recuperate, and regain your true strength. After that, you can come back and have a rematch, can't you? So? Won't that do!"

"What a nag! I'll never give up!"

It was useless to say anything more. My words couldn't reach her.

But even so, I couldn't wuss out here. Having received Kuroneko's curse, failure was not an option. Since I didn't want to start spurting blood, and lie writhing, rolling back and forth on the ground till I die.

At this point, I had to follow her example --- drop your front and be honest.

"You know.....!"

"Eh, kya."

I'm not going to accept any complaints from her.

I grabbed hold of my little sister's shoulders with both hands, and turned her towards me ---

"It's lonely without you, you know!"

Pleadingly.

"..... wha."

With all my effort, I declared my true feelings to the stiffened Kirino.

"I've already blurted out all those stuff buried within me! And the result! I don't really care about what circumstances you have! Forget about Kuroneko or Ayase! I came here to bring you back not because they asked me to, but because I'm lonely without you around! That's all! Any complaints!?!"

The bed made a creaking sound.

Sniff. I'm seriously crying here, how pathetic.

This is bad. Really, somehow. How lonely I had been.

Kirino, despite being Kirino, was dumbfounded, with her eyes freezing up as they widened.

"..... y, you....."

"..... let's go back together. Otherwise, I might die."

I had been truly feeling troubled.

I couldn't help it. Tsk tsk..... I couldn't help it really.....

But, those weren't in any manner a facade, they had arisen from what I truly had felt.

They were heart-felt words sent from a lazy big brother to his little sister, who has always given her best in everything to the point of collapsing.

"There's no need for you to try so hard. No need for you to be so outstanding. It's okay even if you hate me. There's no need to care what others think. If there's anyone who has anything to complain about such a diligent girl like you, always giving her best, I'll beat that guy to a pulp."

Even if I said that, it was a selfish whim of mine. I was pulling Kirino back. Tempting my little sister who's working hard abroad, discouraging her.

I want my little sister to be happy. I want her to be happy at a place where I can see her.

But I don't see it as something for the sake of satisfying my own ego. Every big brother would have felt the same way.

Isn't it so?

"..... stupid Aniki."

She called me that again.

Frankly speaking, it didn't really feel so bad to be called by you in this manner.

But I'm never going to tell you that.

"After we get back, let's hang out at Akiba again. Of course, together with Saori and Kuroneko. In August, there's Natsukomi. If Kuroneko gets into the circle[7], you can be the salesgirl. How about that? And let's go meet the other famous groups that Saori is going to introduce to us. I'll be laden with all your stuff probably, but I'll do my best to bear with it. That's why ---"

"..... I know what you're trying to say."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize, since it's annoying. And my shoulders are hurting. How long are you going to continue grabbing your little sister's shoulders?"

Kirino was no longer crying. She's talking down to people as usual, and an intrepid smile floated on her lips.

She shook off my hands from her shoulders and stood up.

"..... since right now, there's a place I need to go for a while."

Several days later ---. Together with Kirino, we landed at Narita Airport.

We passed through a long passage like a procession of ants.

In the end, Kirino returned. She terminated her overseas studies. Things went more smoothly than I expected. Seems like dropouts for this program among the assemblage of worldwide elites were not uncommon. So that's the case, isn't it?

In the end, I didn't know the actual reason that had extinguished my little sister's determination, making her decide to come home.

Was it my persuasiveness, or was there another reason ?

Whichever the case, Kirino would probably take responsibility for her own decisions. She's still ranting *"It 's all because of you!"* off her mouth to me though, as usual .

That's the type of person she is. Even though the face beside me had a cool look of nonchalance --- I guessed that was not what she really felt in her heart.

"Our old man is picking us up with his car."

"I see."

We grabbed our luggage and underwent a customs inspection. At the place where one passes through the gate, there was a person running towards us. She was panting, her shoulders bobbing up and down.

--- it was Kuroneko.

This was the first time I was seeing her like that. Kirino 's eyes widened, puzzled. She was probably trying to find her words. Her mouth flapped open and shut several times.

"..... you....."

"..... long time..... no see."

As she struggled to catch her breath, Kuroneko muttered expressionlessly. She was in her usual --- well to me, it's been a while since I saw her in that --- pitch black Goth Loli fashion garb. The person who had informed her of the arrival time of our plane was of course me. It was the instant of a reuniting between Kirino and Kuroneko, who had not seen each other for several months.

"..... *hah*..... *hah*..... what's with you..... did, did you run out of breath? Were you in such a hurry to meet me that you ran all the way from the bus stop?"

"..... don't say such foolish things to me..... *hah*..... *hah*. ..... after a few months..... are those the first words one would say?..... an ill-mannered girl..... as usual....."

Is this girl okay? Weren't you the one who started with *hah hah*? You are probably lacking in stamina. Where did you come running from? Kirino being Kirino, despite being extremely happy, had started talking down in a detestable manner.

"Geez --- you guys are still the same."

With a teasing tone, I watched over the two of them facing each other.

"You, you fool. Being a hikikomori and all, don't overdo it."

Kirino, with her cheeks threatening to break into a grin , frantically resisted, and handed something to Kuroneko.

"Here, water."

She handed her a filled PET(TL: a.k.a plastic) bottle. Kuroneko gulped everything down, and then *hah*, she sighed out. "..... how unnecessary.....", she went. And then ---

Leaning in until she's just next to her face, blushing, Kuroneko murmured.

"Welcome..... back."

"..... uhn..... I'm back."

Kirino returned with a smile tinged with embarrassment.

Just for this instant, the two contradictory girls were honest with each other.

Not expecting to see such a scene again, I burned it into my mind.

After that, the two of them just engaged in meaningless conversations.

Making a fuss of the game that Kuroneko had made, making plans for the Natsukomi enthusiastically, asking each other whether the other party had felt lonely without them ---.

It was as if they were trying to catch hold of the time they had lost together.

It greatly resembled the time they were fighting inside a Mac in Akiba one year ago.

"..... fu. So the fact is you lost, turned tail and escape back here. --- aren't you quite the troublemaker?"

"Tch, fooool. Who do you think you are talking to? With more training, it's a definite that I'm going to beat all those guys there next time."

"Really..... in spite of not even being able to scratch them, do you really stand a chance?"

"Fuffuffuffu....."

Kirino took out her iPhone slowly. After some fingering, she showed it to me and Kuroneko.

It seemed like an internet news article. Embedded within the article was the photograph of a girl running on the track. It was a girl with a beautiful brown complexion. Her hair was tied up into a ponytail. Even though she was not very tall, her slender legs were long. She carried an air of a supple thoroughbred. Even though I couldn't read the English content of the article, it seemed like she won some big tournament --- that was what it appeared to be.

"What's this?"

Kuroneko asked. With a sense of pride, she pointed to the screen of her iPhone.

“Lia Hagryy-chan. Among her peers of the same age, she’s probably the world’s fastest grade school student. ….. She’s my roommate over there.”

“In other words..... she’s also faster than you?”

“The current me is not a match for her. She's super cute, very young, with ability unseen of even at the world level. As if she’s a world idol. Fu, and she even made the news.”

Kirino started deriding herself. Seems like even she could make such a face.

“--- --- but, there was one time when I beat her.”

She suddenly became cheerful and puffed out her chest. It didn’t seem like she was lying. My little sister wouldn’t lie about matters pertaining to contests. Since she’s one with an overwhelming sense of pride.

“I see..... you managed to beat her once?”

“Well. It was something like a surprise attack though.”

"But you won."

"..... yeah."

"I see. Then, it's fine."

Kuroneko nodded contentedly.

That's great. It's not like you came running back here with a clean score sheet.

I could tell that it was what she seemed to be saying.

The truth was that this girl came back after returning a blow to the wall of the world[8]. There wasn't a need for Kirino to deride herself as if she hasn't accomplished anything at all.

"By the way ---"

Kuroneko started with the side of her mouth twitching upwards into a broad grin.

"..... when did that happen, I wonder?"

"Hngu."

For some reason, Kirino was at a loss for words.

“It’s, it’s a secret.”

With her face red, she turned the other way.

Kuroneko smirked as if she knew about everything.

“I see. It’s just that you won when you were coincidentally in your perfect condition.”

"You are a really detestable one, you know."

"..... fu..... what do you mean, I wonder? If you don't say it out clearly, I won't understand, you know?"

"I can't be bothered with you!"

Once again, with a sharp jerk, Kirino averted her eyes from Kuroneko,

And at that moment, her eyes widened for an instant as if she had just noticed my presence. But then---

She just stuck out her tongue at me.

..... what the hell.

Not knowing anything, I stood there alone, bewildered .

Well, forget it.

Ahem, I cleared my throat, faced my little sister who had not set foot onto the great land of Japan for several months, and said to her the following.

"Welcome back, Kirino."

Translator's Notes

1. ↑ This is Kuroneko's alias when playing Siscalypse, as first referred to in Volume 3, Chapter 4
2. ↑ Short for boy's love, aka a love story between two male.
3. ↑ 妹- The two kanji are "Imouto" and "Sora". But the reading is forced to "mai" (from like "shimai" and " gimai"), which is probably just to be the English word "My". (The insinuation of the overlap between "Imouto" and "My" is that the sky is one and the same (shared). So like "My sister and I; Under the Same Sky" would be a really long form. Explanation proved by relentlessflame from animesuki.com
4. ↑ Author note : another famous Kuso game
5. ↑ Sena's full name is Akagi Sena (赤). She is the younger sister of Akagi Kouhei () which appeared in episode 12 of the anime. Sena is a Fujoshi(腐), the same age as Kuroneko, which is 2 years younger than Kyousuke. In the earlier parts of this volume, Sena and Kuroneko entered Kyousuke's high school and joined the game research club.
6. ↑ An utterance akin to indicating ‘I see’.
7. ↑ Meaning Doujin group for Doujinshi.

8. ↑ A metaphor. Referring to Lia = wall of the world (ie. a wall / challenge of at the world level), as well as the block she couldn't overcome.